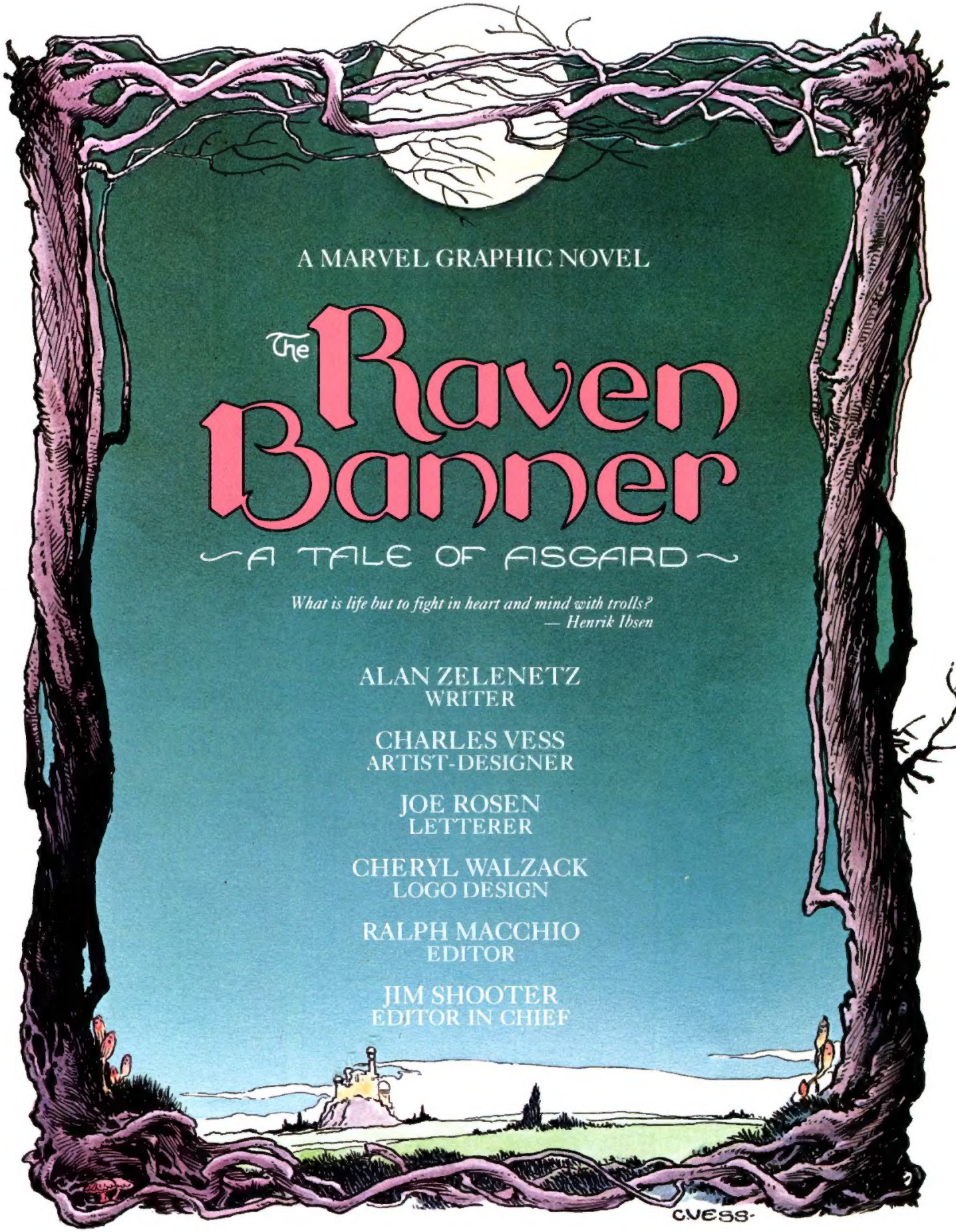
MARVEL® GRAPHIC NOVEL

No. 15
$5.95
$6.95 CAN

The Raven Banner

~A TALE OF ASGARD~

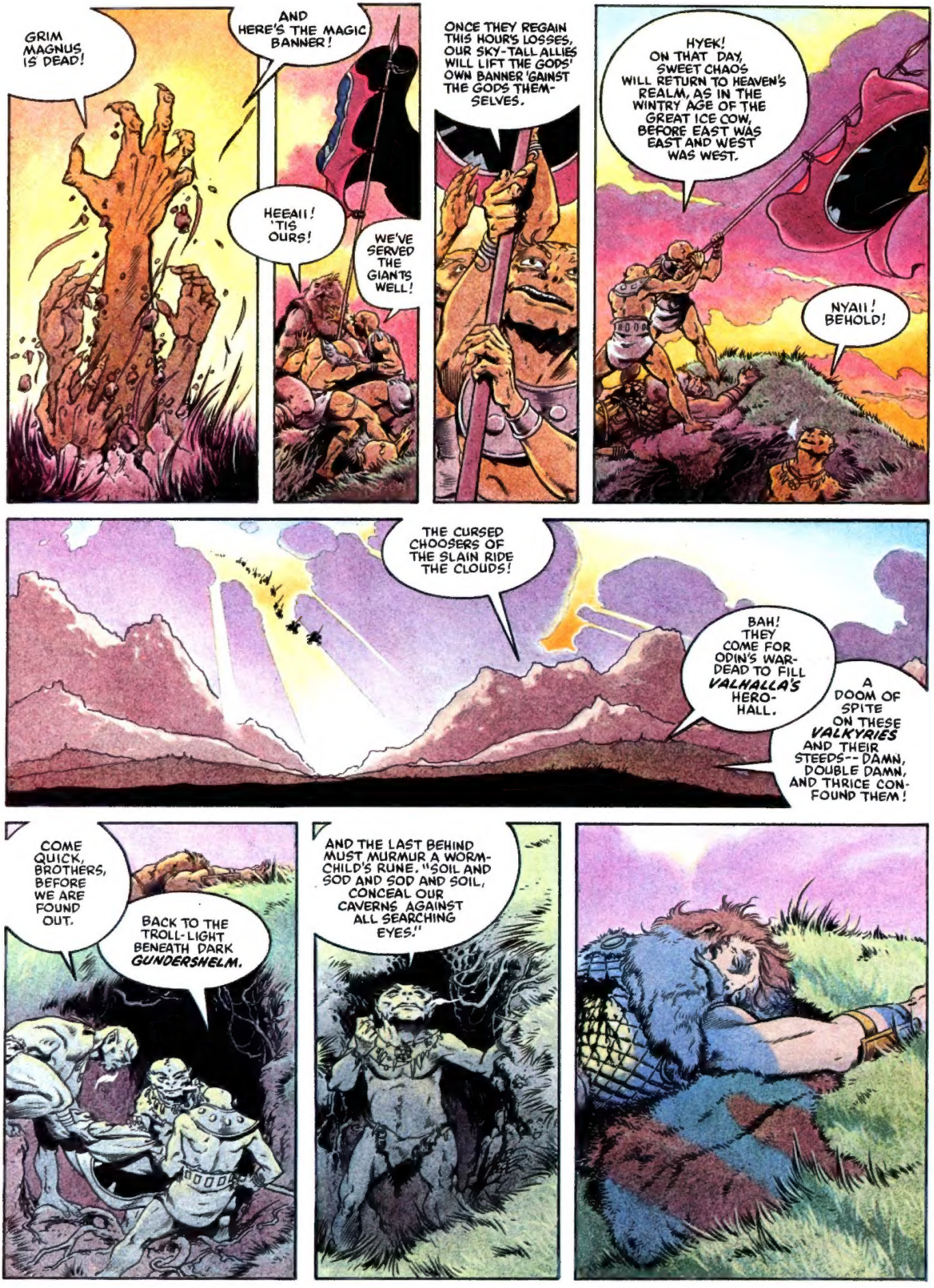
by Alan Zelenetz and Charles Vess

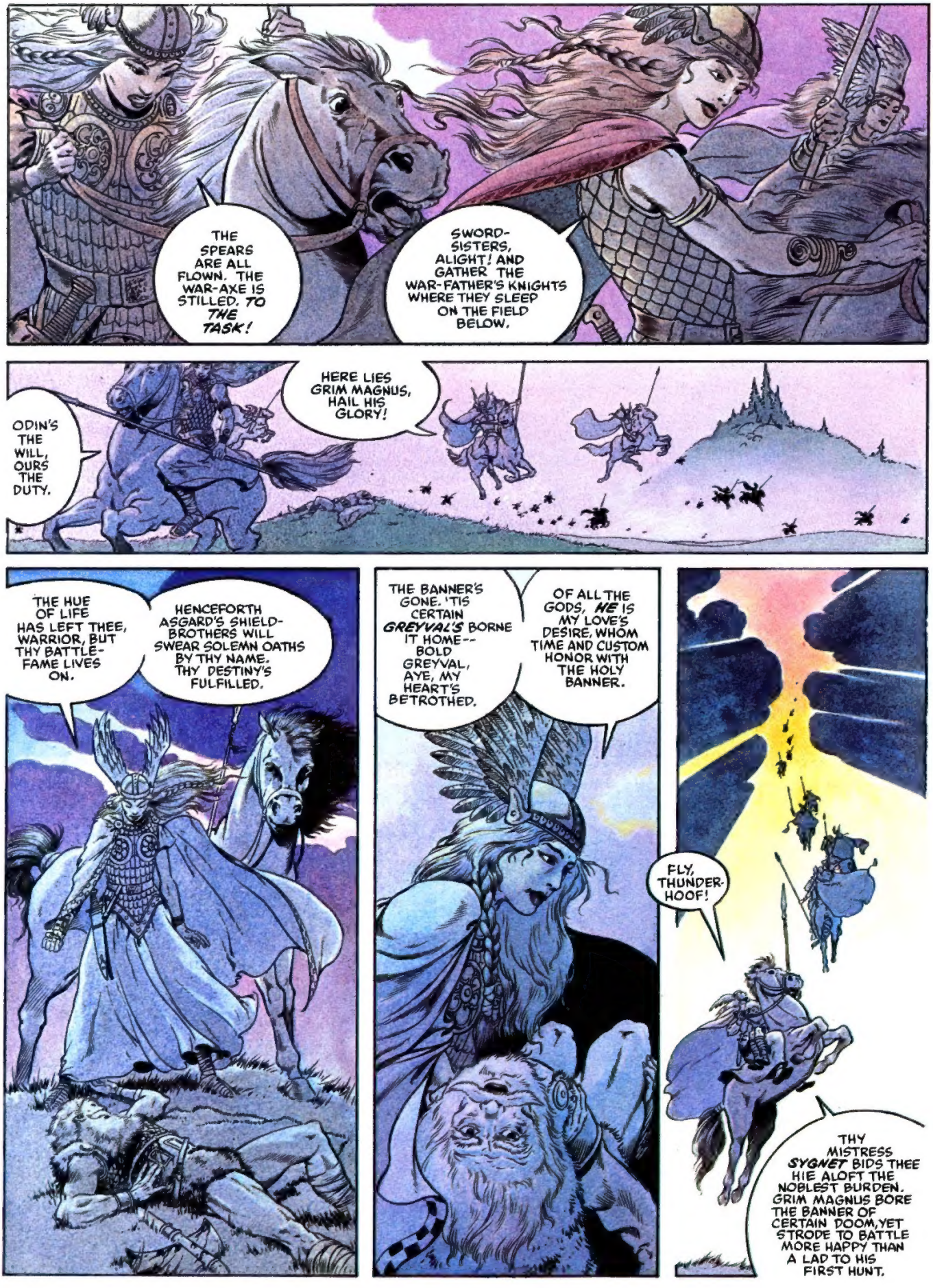

A MARVEL GRAPHIC NOVEL
The Raven Banner
A TALE OF ASGARD
What is life but to fight in heart and mind with trolls?
— Henrik Ibsen
ALAN ZELENETZ
WRITER
CHARLES VESS
ARTIST-DESIGNER
JOE ROSEN
LETTERER
CHERYL WALZACK
LOGO DESIGN
RALPH MACCHIO
EDITOR
JIM SHOOTER
EDITOR IN CHIEF
CVESS

IT BEFELL IN CELESTIAL ASGARD LONG, LONG, AND VERY LONG AGO, WHEN GODS WERE MANY AND ODIN ETERNAL KING...
...THAT THE HATEFUL GIANTS HELD WAR AGAINST THE ALL-FATHER'S HOST, AND HEAVEN'S ROLLING MEADOWS RANG WITH MIGHTY BATTLE...
A SONG OF SHARP-HONED STEEL, FOES OF ASGARD!
BRING DOWN SLAUGHTER ON THE PLAIN OF IDA AND GRIEF TO THE GOLDEN REALM!
GRANT NO GROUND AND NO QUARTER, BOLD SONS OF ODIN!
THE RAVEN BANNER SPREADS TO THE WIND.
ITS MAGIC BRINGS VICTORY TO THOSE WHO FIGHT BENEATH IT...
...THOUGH HE WHOSE HONOR IT IS TO CARRY THE PENNON MUST ALWAYS DIE IN BATTLE. SUCH IS ITS ENCHANT-MENT.
AYE, DIE YOU WILL, STANDARD BEARER, FOR SNORTH--WHOSE MERE GLANCE CAN SPLINTER SHIELDS--CARVES A PATH OF BONE AND BLOOD TO CUT YOU DOWN.
SKRAATH

FORGED ON A TIMELOST ANVIL BEFORE THE HOAR-FROST OGRES FIRST CRAWLED OUT OF ICE AND RIME, MY SWORD HAS DRUNK MORE CRIMSON ALE THAN IRON-JAWED FENRIS, THE WOLF OF WOLVES.
THIS BLADE BRINGS THEE TIDINGS OF DEATH, GODLING.
TO SAVE IMMORTAL ASGARD, A GOD MUST DIE.
THIS NOBLE FATE IS THE GLORY OF GRIM MAGNUS AND THE FAME OF HIS FATHER'S HOUSE.

A NOBLE DEATH!? BY HEL'S DRAGON, NAY!
I'LL GUT YOU FIRST THEN HANG YOUR CORPSE TO DRY LIKE SALTED COD!
UNPH--
--YOUR BOASTS...MEAN LESS THAN THE ...GRUNTING OF A BOAR, STORM GIANT...
...FOR EVEN AS I FALL--HARK!-- MY WAR-FELLOWS TRUMPET ASGARD'S VICTORY...
BARUM BAARUM
...AND DRIVE YOUR DARK FORCES BACK LIKE AN AVALANCHE--
FOR ODIN AND THE HIGH HALLS OF GOLD!
FOR ODIN AND FOR ASGARD I YIELD MY IMMORTALITY...
...AND PASS THE RAVEN BANNER TO MY SON.
COME, WHERE ARE YOU, GREYVAL?
COME NOW, WHY TARRY YOU?
COME, COME, GREYVAL GRIMSON, THE HOLY BANNER MUST BE BORNE HOME BY MY HEIR...
...IT IS UNBREAKABLE TRADITION..
GREYVAL... COME, COME...
GREYVAL--?


GRIM MAGNUS IS DEAD!
AND HERE'S THE MAGIC BANNER!
HEEAII! 'TIS OURS!
WE'VE SERVED THE GIANTS WELL!
ONCE THEY REGAIN THIS HOUR'S LOSSES, OUR SKY-TALL ALLIES WILL LIFT THE GODS' OWN BANNER 'GAINST THE GODS THEMSELVES.
HYEK! ON THAT DAY, SWEET CHAOS WILL RETURN TO HEAVEN'S REALM, AS IN THE WINTRY AGE OF THE GREAT ICE COW, BEFORE EAST WAS EAST AND WEST WAS WEST.
NYAII! BEHOLD!
THE CURSED CHOOSERS OF THE SLAIN RIDE THE CLOUDS!
BAH! THEY COME FOR ODIN'S WAR-DEAD TO FILL VALHALLA'S HERO-HALL.
A DOOM OF SPITE ON THESE VALKYRIES AND THEIR STEEDS-- DAMN, DOUBLE DAMN, AND THRICE CONFOUND THEM!
COME QUICK, BROTHERS, BEFORE WE ARE FOUND OUT.
BACK TO THE TROLL-LIGHT BENEATH DARK GUNDERSHELM.
AND THE LAST BEHIND MUST MURMUR A WORM-CHILD'S RUNE. "SOIL AND SOD AND SOD AND SOIL, CONCEAL OUR CAVERNS AGAINST ALL SEARCHING EYES."


THE SPEARS ARE ALL FLOWN. THE WAR-AXE IS STILLED. TO THE TASK!
SWORD-SISTERS, ALIGHT! AND GATHER THE WAR-FATHER'S KNIGHTS WHERE THEY SLEEP ON THE FIELD BELOW.
ODIN'S THE WILL, OURS THE DUTY.
HERE LIES GRIM MAGNUS, HAIL HIS GLORY!
THE HUE OF LIFE HAS LEFT THEE, WARRIOR, BUT THY BATTLE-FAME LIVES ON.
HENCEFORTH ASGARD'S SHIELD-BROTHERS WILL SWEAR SOLEMN OATHS BY THY NAME. THY DESTINY'S FULFILLED.
THE BANNER'S GONE. 'TIS CERTAIN GREYVAL'S BORNE IT HOME-- BOLD GREYVAL, AYE, MY HEART'S BETROTHED.
OF ALL THE GODS, HE IS MY LOVE'S DESIRE, WHOM TIME AND CUSTOM HONOR WITH THE HOLY BANNER.
FLY, THUNDER-HOOF!
THY MISTRESS SYGNET BIDS THEE HIE ALOFT THE NOBLEST BURDEN. GRIM MAGNUS BORE THE BANNER OF CERTAIN DOOM, YET STRODE TO BATTLE MORE HAPPY THAN A LAD TO HIS FIRST HUNT.

NOW ALL THIS WHILE IN THE KINGDOM OF THE TROLLS BENEATH DARK GUNDERSHELM, A STRANGER DANCED TO A CURIOUS MELODY...

...PLUCKED ON MAGICAL STRINGS TWICE WOVEN ROUND A NEWBORN ELFCHILD'S YAWN AND PIPED ON THE SHINBONES OF A SPITEFUL ELDER DWARF...

COME, *GREYVAL!* HERE'S MORE MEAD, OUR HONORED GUEST.

MORE MEAD?

BUT I'VE ALREADY DRUNK ENOUGH TO DROWN A GIANT--?

COME, GOD OF ASGARD-- WHAT'S ONE SWEET TANKARD MORE OF HONEYED WINE?

OR YET ANOTHER?

BY ODIN'S BEARD, I'LL SAY YOU TROLLS MIX A-- HIC-- HEADY BREW.

CLASP MY WAIST AGAIN, GREYVAL...

...AND WHIRL ME THE WAY OF LOVERS WHEN THEIR HEARTS BURN LIKE THE FIRES OF MUSPELHEIM.

WORD IS COME FROM THE PLAIN OF IDA.

ASKELLA!

WITCHWOMAN, WHAT TIDINGS?
THE HURLYBURLY'S DONE. THE GODS HAVE WON.
WON! BLESSED FORTUNE! AND THE BANNER--?
GONE.
MY FATHER'S... DEAD THEN.
YOU BADE ME SWEAR NOT TO MOURN YOU, FATHER. I'LL HONOR MY WORD.
A BRAVE WARRIOR'S DEATH--THAT'S ALL HE DREAMED OF, MY SIRE, FOR ALL THAT I LOVED HIM.
I DARED NOT SPEAK MY TRUE HEART TO HIM, YET NEVER UNDERSTOOD HOW ONE COULD CHOOSE GREY MELANCHOLY DEATH OVER LIFE ETERNAL IN ASGARD'S GREEN FIELDS.
WHICH IS *NOT* TO SUGGEST GREYVAL GRIMSON'S A COWARD!
HYEK! I, *SVIN*, WILL FEIGN TO BE THY FOE--
HYEK! A MORTAL THRUST! NOW I PRETEND TO DIE-- OH!
AYE, MY FATHER'S SON IS A *BRAVE* FELLOW FOR SURE...

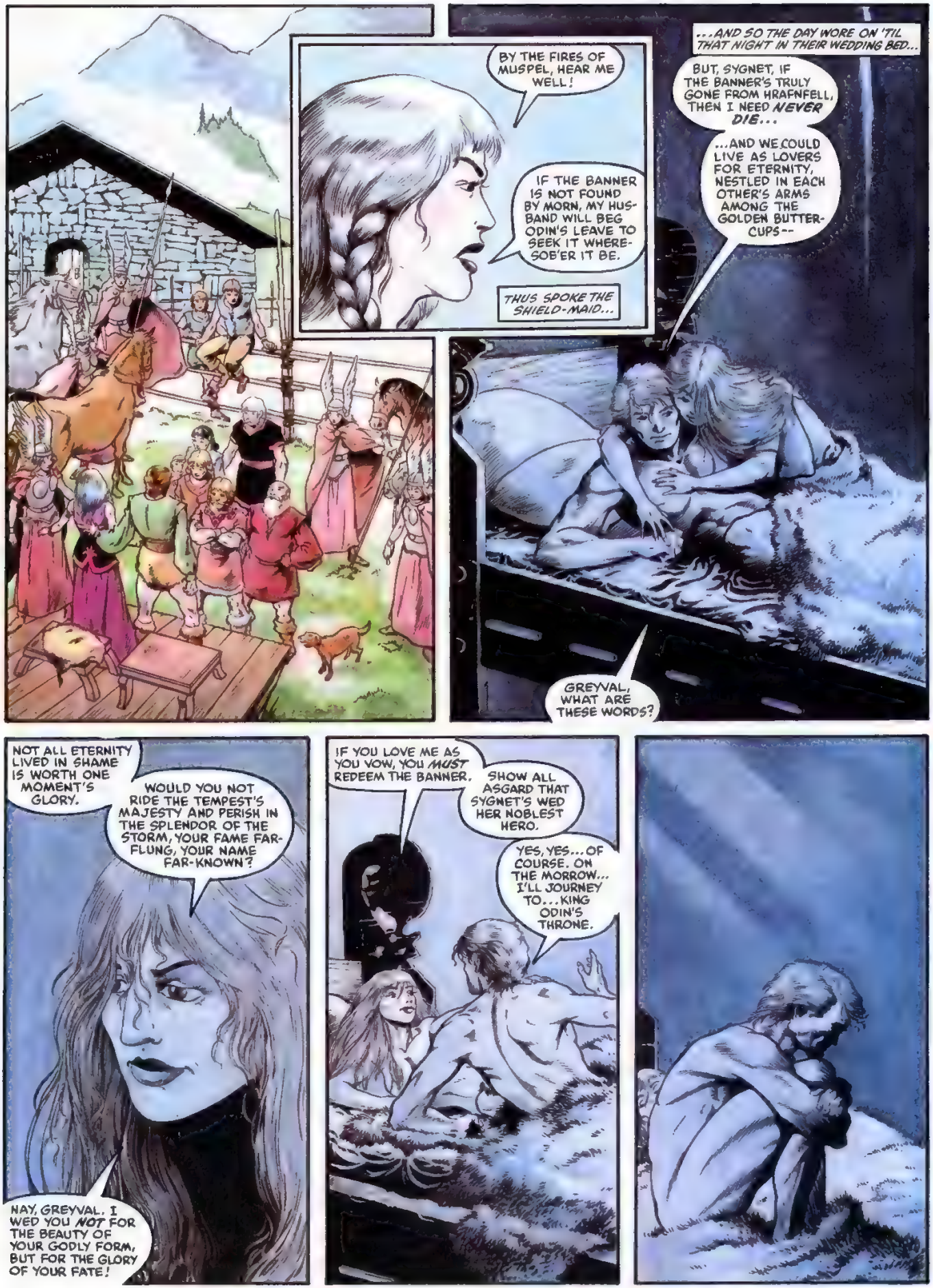
...A BRAVE AND NOBLE FELLOW. WHY I RECALL ONE TIME--
--THERE I AM, HUNTING A GREAT BUCK DEER ACROSS THE SNOW...
...WITH NEITHER SPEAR NOR BOW BUT ONLY THESE BARE HANDS.
SUDDENLY I LEAP UPON HIS ANTLER HORNS AND THROW HIM TO THE GROUND!
SHOW US! I'LL BE YOUR STAG~
BY THE WORLD TREE, SVIN, YOU'RE NOT--?
HURT? HYEK! NO. I WORE ENCHANTMENT 'GAINST THY VIGOR, STALWART KNIGHT.
SO YOU SEE, THOUGH I'M AS FEARLESS AS THE NEXT GOD, STILL I'D RATHER GO ON EATING ASGARD'S GOLDEN APPLES OF IMMORTALITY THAN CARRY THE RAVEN BANNER TO MY ETERNAL DOOM.
I WAS WISE THIS MORN TO JOIN YOUR MERRYMAKING WHILE MY DIVINE FELLOWS WAGED BATTLE ABOVE-GROUND.
FOR IT'S JUST AS YOU TROLLS HAVE SAID. LET ANOTHER GODLY FAMILY REDEEM THE BANNER NOW AND OWN THE HONOR TO DIE FOR ASGARD.

COME, GREYVAL, HERE'S THE PICK OF THE TROLL-VINE. ARE YOU READY TO RENOUNCE THE DAYLIGHT ABOVE?
YES, RENOUNCE... YET... YET IF MY NOBLE FATHER'S GONE TO HIS DESIRED END, THEN THE FARM'S NOW MY RESPONSIBILITY.
BUT HERE IN OUR PLEASURE HALL YOU CAN BE IRRESPONSIBLE AS A CHILD...
...AND PURPOSELESS AS THE WIND'S ECHO IN A SEASHELL.
AYE! AYE!
NAY, SYGNET.
TOO MUCH MEAD'S ADDLED MY WITS OR HOW COULD I FORGET MY LOVE--FAIR SYGNET OF THE UNFLINCHING EYES AND HIGH BEAUTY!
WE PLEDGED TO MY FATHER THAT OUR WEDDING VOWS WOULD CELEBRATE HIS FINAL BATTLE-GLORY.
ASKELLA PROPHESIES.
THE FOOL IS FUDDLED BY OUR QUEER ILLUSIONS. HE BELIEVES THE GODS REDEEM THE BANNER...
...AND THAT WE TROLLS REJOICE IN THEIR VICTORY. LET HIM LEAVE.
I FORESEE IN DUE TIME, A VISION OF THIS WEAK-WILLED SOUL COME AGAIN TO KNEEL AS A VASSAL AT OUR FEET 'TIL THE BOTTOMLESS ABYSS OF SHADOWS FILLS WITH BLOOD.
FAREWELL, SVIN. SOME DAY, PERHAPS, I SHALL RETURN.
I'LL GUIDE THEE NOT ONE TROLL-PACE MORE. I CANNOT ABIDE ASGARD'S GOLDEN LIGHT.

SO OFF WENT GREYVAL FROM THE KINGDOM OF THE TROLLS, BACK TO THE GENTLE MEADOW-LANDS OF ASGARD AND THE HOMESTEAD OF HIS FATHER, HRAFNFELL, THE RAVEN'S ROOST...
...WHERE, TRUTH TO SAY, THE NEXT DAY HE AND SYGNET WED, AS WAS THEIR PLIGHTED TROTH...
YES, IT'S TRUE-- ALL ALONE DURING YESTERDAY'S BATTLE I FELLED FIFTEEN GIANTS LIKE THAT MANY PINE TREES--
OH HO, GREYVAL! LAST NIGHT YOU SAID 'TWAS FIVE YOU SLEW.
AND THIS MORNING TEN.
WELL...WELL, YOU SEE...IN THE HEAT OF BATTLE, WHO CAN KEEP COUNT ANYWAY, EH, FRIENDS?
WHY, SO BERSERK WAS I--I EVEN LEFT THE RAVEN BANNER ON THE FIELD!
AYE, COUSIN, BUT SURELY SOME OTHER WARRIOR RETRIEVED IT AND WILL RETURN IT TO ITS RIGHTFUL ROOST AT HRAFNFELL?
YES... WHY...YES, HORSKULD. I TRUST SO.
KNOW THIS, FRIENDS AND KINSMEN.
HAD WE NOT SWORN TO CELEBRATE WITH WEDDING JOY THE JOURNEY OF GRIM MAGNUS TO VALHALLA--LAND WHERE DWELL THE HONORED DEAD...
...MY HUSBAND WOULD THIS MOMENT SEEK THE BANNER IN THE CITY OF ASGARD.
COME, FELLOWS, THERE'S TIME ENOUGH FOR EARNESTNESS WHEN THE MOON'S FULL AND NIGHTMOTHS FLY.
A HORSE FIGHT'S NEXT!
MAY ODIN RIDE THE WIND ON HIS EIGHT-LEGGED STEED TO SHOWER BLESSINGS ON ALL NEWLYWEDS INDEED
BRIDE AND GROOM, THE HIGH SEATS ARE YOURS FOR THE OCCASION.
THE BETTER TO VIEW YOUR HORSE'S VICTORY, MY HUSBAND.

I'VE PIT MY BLACK STALLION AGAINST YOUR SPRIGHTLY STEED, COUSIN.
THE LUCK OF THE RUNES BE WITH YOU...AND YOUR PROUD WIFE.
AND WITH YOU, HORSKULD.
RAISE THE HORSE-GOADS--LET THE MERRIMENT BEGIN!
WHNEEIGH
HNNH
THEY TAKE TO BATTLE WITH LITTLE PRODDING AS DO TRUE WARRIORS.
AYE, THERE'S YOUTH AND METTLE IN THEM BOTH FOR SURE.
BUT LOOK--A KICK! A BITE!
HERE--
SEE--
HO! GREYVAL'S GIVES WAY--
AND HORSKULD WINS THE MEAD THIS DAY!

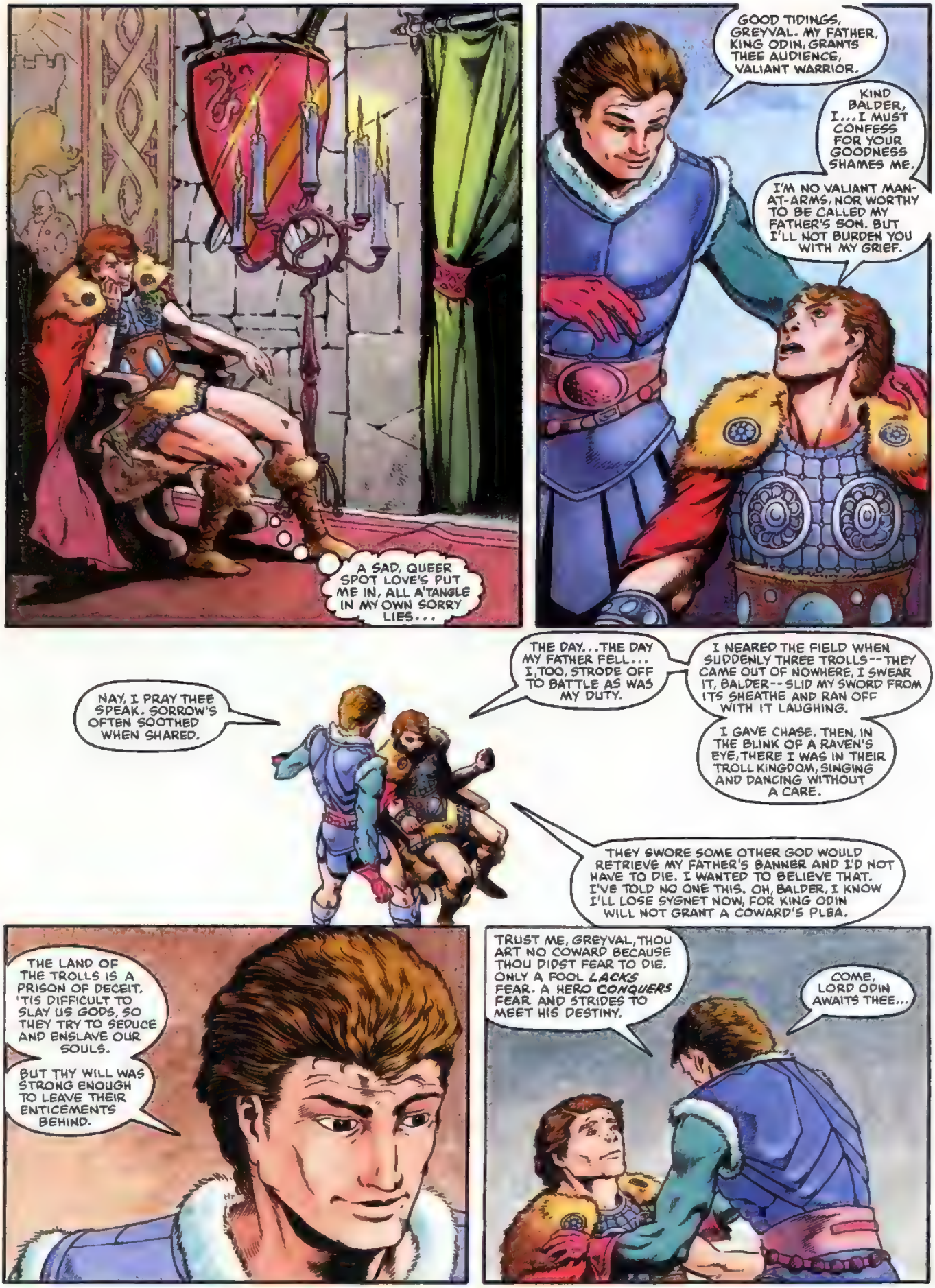
HNNHWHNNH
LORD AND LADY, MY MOST HUMBLE APOLOGIES.
'TWAS NOT MY INTENT TO CLOUD YOUR WEDDING DAY WITH A TRIUMPH OF MY OWN.
NO MATTER, DEAR HORSKULD.
I'D RATHER PLAY GROOM TO MY BRIDE THAN A GROOM TO HORSES ANYWAY. HA!
BUT, GREYVAL--
LOOK!
THE VALKYRIE... ODIN'S OWN CHOOSERS OF THE SLAIN.
COME NO DOUBT TO CELEBRATE THIS HANDFAST MARRIAGE.
GREETINGS, SPEAR-SISTER, AND PARDONS FOR OUR LATENESS TO YOUR FEAST.
BUT THE CITY OF ASGARD'S ALL ASTIR.
THE RAVEN BANNER'S NOT BEEN FOUND.
ALL-FATHER ODIN WAXES FURIOUS, 'TIS FEARED THE TROLLS STOLE THE BANNER FOR THE GIANTS...
...AND GREYVAL GRIMSON'S GUILTY OF GRAVE OVER-SIGHT FOR LEAVING IT BEHIND.
BUT THE TROLLS PROMISED THAT THE GODS WOULD REDEEM--?
SAY, GREYVAL, WAS YOUR MIND REALLY SO LOST IN BATTLE YOU NEGLECTED YOUR MOST SOLEMN DUTY?
PERHAPS HE'S NOT GRIM MAGNUS'S SON AT ALL--BUT A CHANGELING LEFT BY ELVES WHEN HE WAS JUST A SQUAWLING BRAT.

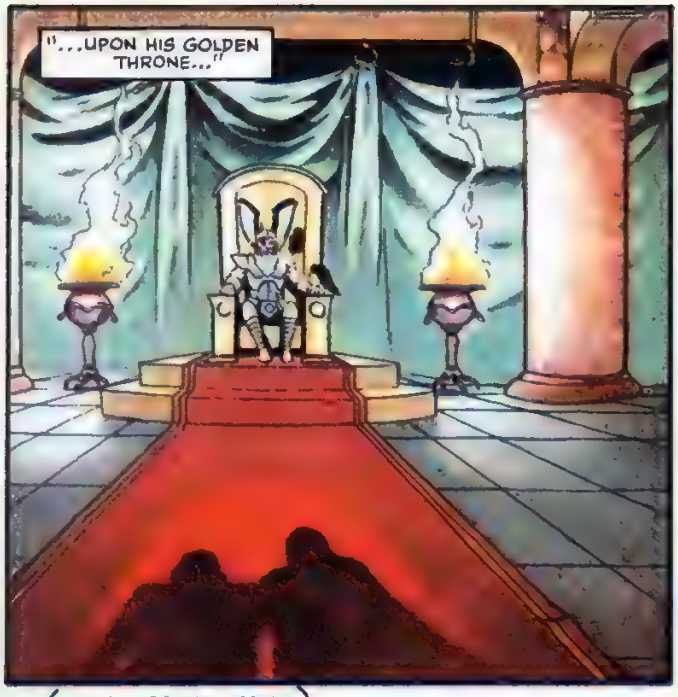

BY THE FIRES OF MUSPEL, HEAR ME WELL!
IF THE BANNER IS NOT FOUND BY MORN, MY HUSBAND WILL BEG ODIN'S LEAVE TO SEEK IT WHERESOB'ER IT BE.
THUS SPOKE THE SHIELD-MAID...
...AND SO THE DAY WORE ON 'TIL THAT NIGHT IN THEIR WEDDING BED...
BUT, SYGNET, IF THE BANNER'S TRULY GONE FROM HRAFNFELL, THEN I NEED NEVER DIE...
...AND WE COULD LIVE AS LOVERS FOR ETERNITY, NESTLED IN EACH OTHER'S ARMS AMONG THE GOLDEN BUTTERCUPS--
GREYVAL, WHAT ARE THESE WORDS?
NOT ALL ETERNITY LIVED IN SHAME IS WORTH ONE MOMENT'S GLORY.
WOULD YOU NOT RIDE THE TEMPEST'S MAJESTY AND PERISH IN THE SPLENDOR OF THE STORM, YOUR FAME FAR-FLUNG, YOUR NAME FAR-KNOWN?
NAY, GREYVAL. I WED YOU NOT FOR THE BEAUTY OF YOUR GODLY FORM, BUT FOR THE GLORY OF YOUR FATE!
IF YOU LOVE ME AS YOU VOW, YOU MUST REDEEM THE BANNER.
SHOW ALL ASGARD THAT SYGNET'S WED HER NOBLEST HERO.
YES, YES... OF COURSE. ON THE MORROW... I'LL JOURNEY TO... KING ODIN'S THRONE.

AND THAT NEXT DAY, AS SUN AND MOON ARE MEASURED WHERE GODS DWELL...
MUST YOU TARRY, GREYVAL?
FORGIVE ME, SYGNET-- I'VE NOT SEEN THE ROYAL CAPITAL SINCE I ROPE HERE A SMALL BOY ON MY FATHER'S SHOULDERS.
THE STREETS GLITTER LIKE SUNLIGHT IN A LOOKING-GLASS--
COME, YOU'VE MORE URGENT PURPOSE THAN TO GAPE.
SYGNET! PRINCE THOR AND THE WARRIORS THREE!
WAIT FOR ME!
AYE, HUSBAND, THEY SALLY FORTH--GUARDIANS OF THE REALM...
...FOR ASGARD MUST BE EVER VIGILANT...
VOLSTAAG, DARE YOU RUN OFF AND LEAVE ME ALONE WITH OUR WHINING BROOD AGAIN?
OD' PITY YOUR RETURN, YOU IRRESPONSIBLE TUB OF MEAD!
...THE MORE SO UNTIL THE RAVEN BANNER'S FOUND.

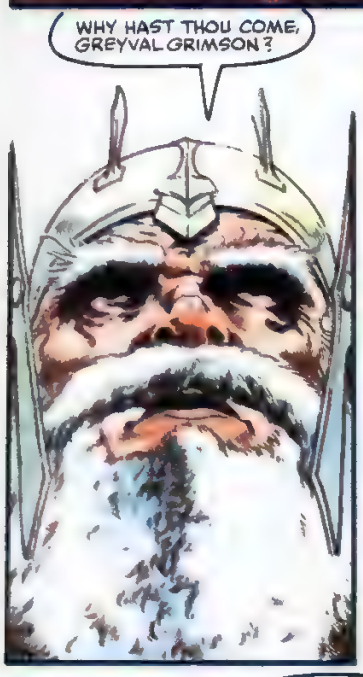
THIS WAY TO THE PALACE, GREYVAL.
YES... BUT WHAT IF THE ALL-FATHER DENIES ME AUDIENCE, OR--?
WHY, LOOK! IT'S HORSKULD.
WHAT BUSINESS HAS ME HERE?
I SHOULD THINK THAT ANSWER'S OBVIOUS, MY LADY.
COWARDS ARE COMMON AS TWIGS. ONLY A RARE GOD CAN REDEEM THE SHAME MY COUSIN'S BROUGHT ON US ALL.
KING ODIN GRANTS ME LEAVE TO SEEK THE LOST BANNER.
BUT TRADITION--?
TRADITION? MY FATHER IS HALF-BROTHER TO GRIM MAGNUS. IT'S NO BREACH OF CUSTOM IF I'M APPOINTED TO SUCCEED WHERE MY BLOOD-COUSIN FAILED.
PERHAPS YOU'VE WED THE WRONG CHAMPION, SYGNET, MY FAIR BEAUTY.
YOUR BOLD HUSBAND SEEMS AS PALE AS CURDLED CREAM, GREAT FIGHTING-MAN THOUGH HE PRETENDS TO BE. HA!
GOOD NOON NOW, BRIDE AND GROOM, MY TASK IS URGENT. THE LUCK OF THE RUNES BE WITH YOU.

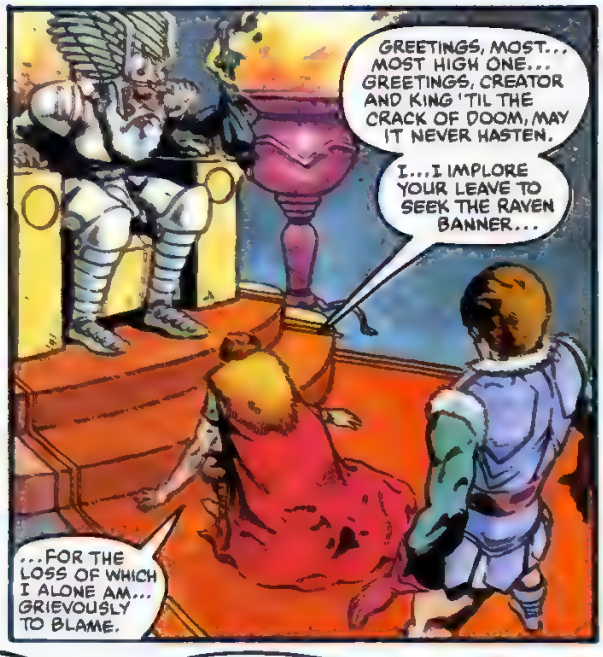
BUT THEN... I MEAN...IT SEEMS KING ODIN'S DECIDED AND THE FATES DECREED I'M NOT THE ONE TO--
DO TROLLS TWIST YOUR TONGUE!?
YOU MUST BEG THE ALL-FATHER!
FALL TO YOUR KNEES, APPEAL--!
MY LADY SYGNET, WHATEVER TROUBLES THEE?
BRAVE BALDER, IS IT YOU?
MY HUSBAND WOULD REDEEM THE RAVEN BANNER. BUT ALAS! OUR LIEGE ALREADY GRANTS THAT PRIVILEGE TO THE WARRIOR HORSKULD. WE ARE DISGRACED.
NAY. GRIEVE NOT, SHIELD-MAID. MANY A FIERCE BATTLE I FOUGHT SWORD-FELLOW TO GRIM MAGNUS, INSPIRED BY HIS IRON HEART. I VOW HIS SON SHALL SEE MY SIRE THIS DAY.
GRACIOUS BALDER!
ONLY AWAIT US, DEAR LADY, BEYOND WHERE THE SKYLARKS SING IN THE ROYAL GARDENS.
GREYVAL, COME WITH ME.

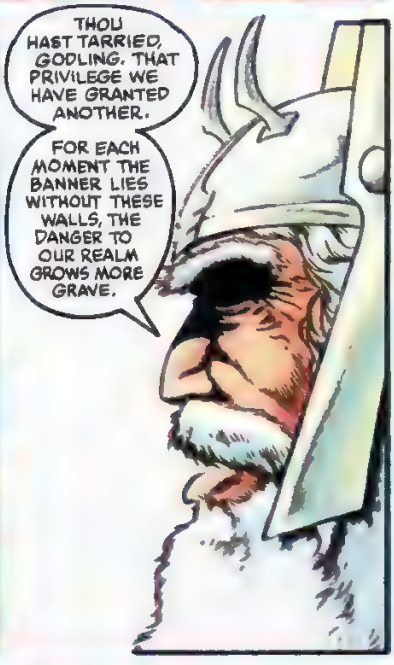

A SAD, QUEER SPOT LOVE'S PUT ME IN, ALL A'TANGLE IN MY OWN SORRY LIES...
GOOD TIDINGS, GREYVAL. MY FATHER, KING ODIN, GRANTS THEE AUDIENCE, VALIANT WARRIOR.
KIND BALDER, I...I MUST CONFESS FOR YOUR GOODNESS SHAMES ME.
I'M NO VALIANT MAN-AT-ARMS, NOR WORTHY TO BE CALLED MY FATHER'S SON. BUT I'LL NOT BURDEN YOU WITH MY GRIEF.
NAY, I PRAY THEE SPEAK. SORROW'S OFTEN SOOTHED WHEN SHARED.
THE DAY...THE DAY MY FATHER FELL... I, TOO, STRODE OFF TO BATTLE AS WAS MY DUTY.
I NEARED THE FIELD WHEN SUDDENLY THREE TROLLS--THEY CAME OUT OF NOWHERE, I SWEAR IT, BALDER--SLID MY SWORD FROM ITS SHEATHE AND RAN OFF WITH IT LAUGHING.
I GAVE CHASE. THEN, IN THE BLINK OF A RAVEN'S EYE, THERE I WAS IN THEIR TROLL KINGDOM, SINGING AND DANCING WITHOUT A CARE.
THEY SWORE SOME OTHER GOD WOULD RETRIEVE MY FATHER'S BANNER AND I'D NOT HAVE TO DIE. I WANTED TO BELIEVE THAT. I'VE TOLD NO ONE THIS. OH, BALDER, I KNOW I'LL LOSE SYGNET NOW, FOR KING ODIN WILL NOT GRANT A COWARD'S PLEA.
THE LAND OF THE TROLLS IS A PRISON OF DECEIT. 'TIS DIFFICULT TO SLAY US GODS, SO THEY TRY TO SEDUCE AND ENSLAVE OUR SOULS.
BUT THY WILL WAS STRONG ENOUGH TO LEAVE THEIR ENTICEMENTS BEHIND.
TRUST ME, GREYVAL, THOU ART NO COWARD BECAUSE THOU DIDST FEAR TO DIE. ONLY A FOOL *LACKS* FEAR. A HERO *CONQUERS* FEAR AND STRIDES TO MEET HIS DESTINY.
COME, LORD ODIN AWAITS THEE...


"...UPON HIS GOLDEN THRONE..."

KING ODIN'S FACE IS GRIM, BALDER. I DARE NOT BEG FAVOR BENEATH HIS GAZE--
FORWARD, INTO OUR PRESENCE.


WHY HAST THOU COME, GREYVAL GRIMSON?


GREETINGS, MOST... MOST HIGH ONE... GREETINGS, CREATOR AND KING 'TIL THE CRACK OF DOOM, MAY IT NEVER HASTEN.
I...I IMPLORE YOUR LEAVE TO SEEK THE RAVEN BANNER...
...FOR THE LOSS OF WHICH I ALONE AM... GRIEVOUSLY TO BLAME.


THOU HAST TARRIED, GODLING. THAT PRIVILEGE WE HAVE GRANTED ANOTHER.
FOR EACH MOMENT THE BANNER LIES WITHOUT THESE WALLS, THE DANGER TO OUR REALM GROWS MORE GRAVE.

BY THY LEAVE, FATHER, CANNOT A GOD ATONE?
I PRAY THEE, ALLOW GRIM MAGNUS' SON TO REDEEM HIMSELF, FOR HE IS SORELY PENITENT.
INDEED, BY THY CONSENT I WOULD MYSELF ESCORT HIM ON HIS PRESSING QUEST.

THE KING CONSENTS. I'LL SEARCH FOR THE BANNER. THOUGH HORSKULD, TOO, MAY SEEK IT ON HIS OWN. BALDER GOES WITH ME, BUT YOU MUST REMAIN AMONG THE VALKYRIE 'TIL OUR RETURN, MY LOVE.
GRIMSON, GRIMSON! BY MY IMMORTAL EYES, LET'S NOT TARRY!
WISE MORDUK.
THE SAGES ARE AGREED. BEFORE YOU JOURNEY AFTER THE MAGIC PENNON YOU MUST VISIT YOUR FATHER'S SHADE IN VALHALLA-- WHERE ALL ASGARD'S HONORED DEAD PASS ETERNITY IN JOYOUS BATTLE.
YOUR FATHER'S SPIRIT WILL GUIDE YOU FROM THERE. THIS MAP WILL AID YOU FURTHER.
BUT MIND, THERE ARE PERILS AND PERILS ALONG THE WAY...
...AND 'TIS RARE FOR ONE STILL FLUSH WITH LIFE TO CROSS VALHALLA'S GOLDEN BRIDGE. ONLY HE OF DAUNTLESS SPIRIT MAY HOPE TO SUCCEED.
Ha
Niflheim
Valhalla
Sea of Nastrond
Nastrond
Sea of Space
Enchanted Chasm
Norn Forest
Enchanted Forest
Forest of Sigurd
Domain of Trolls and Abyss of Shadows
Bifrost
City of Asgard
Asgard
Asgard Mountain
Jotunheim
(Domain
Boiling Plain
N
W
E
S
THEN THAT HOPE WILL BE MY STRENGTH. YET WHILE I'M OFF TO VALHALLA MIGHT NOT MY COUSIN HORSKULD--
--FIND THE BANNER? TRUE, HE'S TAKEN A LEAD, BUT, BY MY IMMORTAL WHISKERS, THAT HAUGHTY HORSKULD REFUSED THE COUNSEL OF MORDUK AND THE SAGES...
...AND GALLOPED AWAY COMPANION-LESS, TRUSTING ALL AND ONLY TO HIMSELF.
HE'LL RIDE IN CIRCLES 'TIL HE FINDS A CLUE.
YOU CAN STILL OUTSTRIP HIM, GRIMSON, AND REDEEM THE FATEFUL PRIZE.
THEN I'M PREPARED-- WHAT? THAT SHADOW?

'TIS AGNAR, KING OF EAGLES, COME TO SPEED YOU ON YOUR WAY.
I'LL BID HIM IN BIRD'S TONGUE TO CARRY US VALHALLA-WARDS, GREYVAL.
AGNAR SAYS WE MAY ALIGHT NOW, FRIEND.
FAREWELL, DEAR SYGNET. THE DARK WOLF OF NIGHT WILL DEVOUR ASGARD'S SUN BEFORE I FORGET YOU, BELOVED.
FAREWELL, MY NOBLE HERO.
REMEMBER ALWAYS THAT NOT ALL THE WORLD'S BRAVE SENTIMENTS CAN OUTWEIGH ONE BRAVE DEED.

SO OFF FLEW AGNAR...

...LIKE A WINGED HOPE...

...AND FROM THE TALLEST PEAK IN ALL THE UNIVERSE, *HLIDSKJALF* THE HIGH MOUNTAIN SEAT, ODIN WATCHED THE KING OF EAGLES GLIDE BEYOND THE CLOUDS...

AH, HERE YOU ARE, MY LORD.

WHY DO YOU HIDE ON HIGH WHERE WINTER IS ETERNAL AND THE AIR MOST CHILL?

TO CLEAR MY HEAD OF BUSY THOUGHTS THAT BUZZ LIKE MAYFLIES, MY BELOVED QUEEN.

SIRE, WHAT THOUGHTS?

WIFE, DID ASGARD NOT ONCE SEEM PEACEFUL BENEATH OUR GAZE?

YET 'TWAS THAT SORT OF PEACE AS REIGNS UPON THE PLACID SEA BEFORE A SPITEFUL WIND-SPRITE STIRS THE TEMPEST TO FURY.

EVEN AS WE SHARE THESE WORDS, THE GIANTS AND THE TROLLS UNITE, THEIR ONE CRUEL PURPOSE TO UNLOOSE BITTER CHAOS ON THE GODS.

OUR FOES ARE VENGEFUL, FRIGGA, SELFISH AND REMORSELESS...

...AND THEY OWN THE RAVEN BANNER OF VICTORY.

TIME'S FATHER'S FATHER WOVE THE ENCHANTED PENNON. THERE IS NONE OTHER LIKE IT.

THEN, ODIN, YOU MUST DISPATCH EVERY WARRIOR TO SCOUR THE DARKEST CORNERS OF OUR REALM--

"NAY. THE *FATES* DECREE ONLY A GOD DESCENDED FROM GRIM MAGNUS' LINE MIGHT SAVE THE BANNER. OF THESE, THERE ARE BUT TWO.

"*HORSKULD*, A KNIGHT OF METTLE, BUT FULL OF PRIDE. AND PRIDE IS OFTEN PRELUDE TO A FALL.

"*GREYVAL GRIMSON* IS THE OTHER, A CALLOW YOUTH OF GOOD INTENT, NOT COWARDLY, BUT RIDDLED WITH SELF-DOUBT.

"BRAVE *BALDER* GUIDES HIM ON HIS WAY TO INSTILL CONFIDENCE IN THE GODLING'S SOUL."

IF NOT HE NOR HORSKULD FINDS THE BANNER, I FEAR, DEAR WIFE, THE TWILIGHT OF THE GODS, THE DOOM THAT IS RAGNAROK, DRAWS NIGH.

HOWEVER GRAVE THE DANGER, HUSBAND, WE MUST MAKE THE BEST OF IT AND TURN A BOLD FACE TO THE WAITING FOE.

OF AGNAR'S FLIGHT NEED NAUGHT BE SAID SAVE THAT HE SOARED ALOFT AND SAILED PAST THE RAGING RIVER GOPUL...
...SKIMMING ACROSS HILLS HIGHER THAN HEAVEN...
...AND ALL THAT WHILE THE SUN SHONE EVER-PLEASANTLY ON GREYVAL...
...AND THE CLOUDS NEVER DRIZZLED A DROP ON BALDER...
...'TIL AT LENGTH AND AT LAST THEY CAME TO REST ON AN AERIE OVERLOOKING THE ENCHANTED CHASM THAT SEPARATES ASGARD FROM THE LANDS OF THE DEAD...
...
WHAT IS IT?
THIS IS AS FAR AS AGNAR FLIES. NOT EVEN THE KING OF BIRDS DARES CROSS THE GORGE OF PERILOUS MISTS.
WE MUST DESCEND ALONE ON FOOT.
DOWN THERE? ON FOOT? IT'S IMPOSSIBLE.
NAY, GREYVAL, PUT A STOUT HEART TO A STEEP SLOPE.

MUCH THANKS, AND FAREWELL, YOUR HIGHNESS.
HE SAYS THIS ROPE OF MOUNTAIN SHRUBS WILL CARRY OUR WEIGHT.
COME, I'LL LEAD THE WAY.
WAIT FOR ME.
SLOWLY, SLOWLY--OUCH! THESE THORNS--
THAT STINGS--OH!
CAN'T HOLD ON, OH! ALL'S LOST!
BAAALDERRR!
CLAP
STEADY, FRIEND, STEADY TO THE BOTTOM.
THERE, 'TIS DONE, AND TRUE VALOR DELIGHTS IN THE TESTING.
WHAT NOW, BALDER?

WHY, THROUGH THESE MISTS TO FIND VALHALLA'S GOLDEN BRIDGE.
ONLY UNSHEATHE YOUR SWORD, FOR THESE CLOUDY CAVERNS ARE HOME TO WICKED OGRES AND WINGED WORMS THAT WEAR THE FACES OF FAIR LADIES.
AN ECHO, DO YOU HEAR?
AYE, MOST SORROWFUL.
OH I AM LOST
AND NONE CAN HELP
FOR SOON THE MONSTER EATS ME BONE AND BLOOD
SOMEONE WEEPS AT THE FAR END OF THIS PASS.
PASS? AHA! WHO WOULD PASS OVER THIS OGRE'S SPAN?
WE SEEK SAFE CROSSING TO VALHALLA AND MEAN THEE NO HARM, STRANGER--
GRAAH! NOT FORWARD NOT BACK BUT STAY WHERE YOU'RE AT, FOR YOUR BRAINS AND BONES WILL FILL MY BELLY.

WHAT A FEAST, WHAT A TREAT!
I'LL GNAW ON YOUR RIBS AND PICK YOUR STRINGY FLESH FROM MY TEETH AT LEISURE WITH A DRAGON-TAIL SPIKE.
NAY, WE GODS MAKE NO OGRE'S BANQUET!
HAARGH! LITTLE BRAGGART! I'LL PICKLE YOUR LIMBS--
--AND GARNISH YOUR JELLIED HEAD WITH MUCK SCALLIONS!
OH!
GREYVAL... I'M FALLING...
NEVER!
YAOWW, GRAOOOWL! MY ANKLE!
QUICK, HERE'S A HAND!
A BRAVE DEED, FRIEND.
MORE DESPERATE THAN BRAVE. WHAT SHOULD I DO IF YOU WERE GONE?

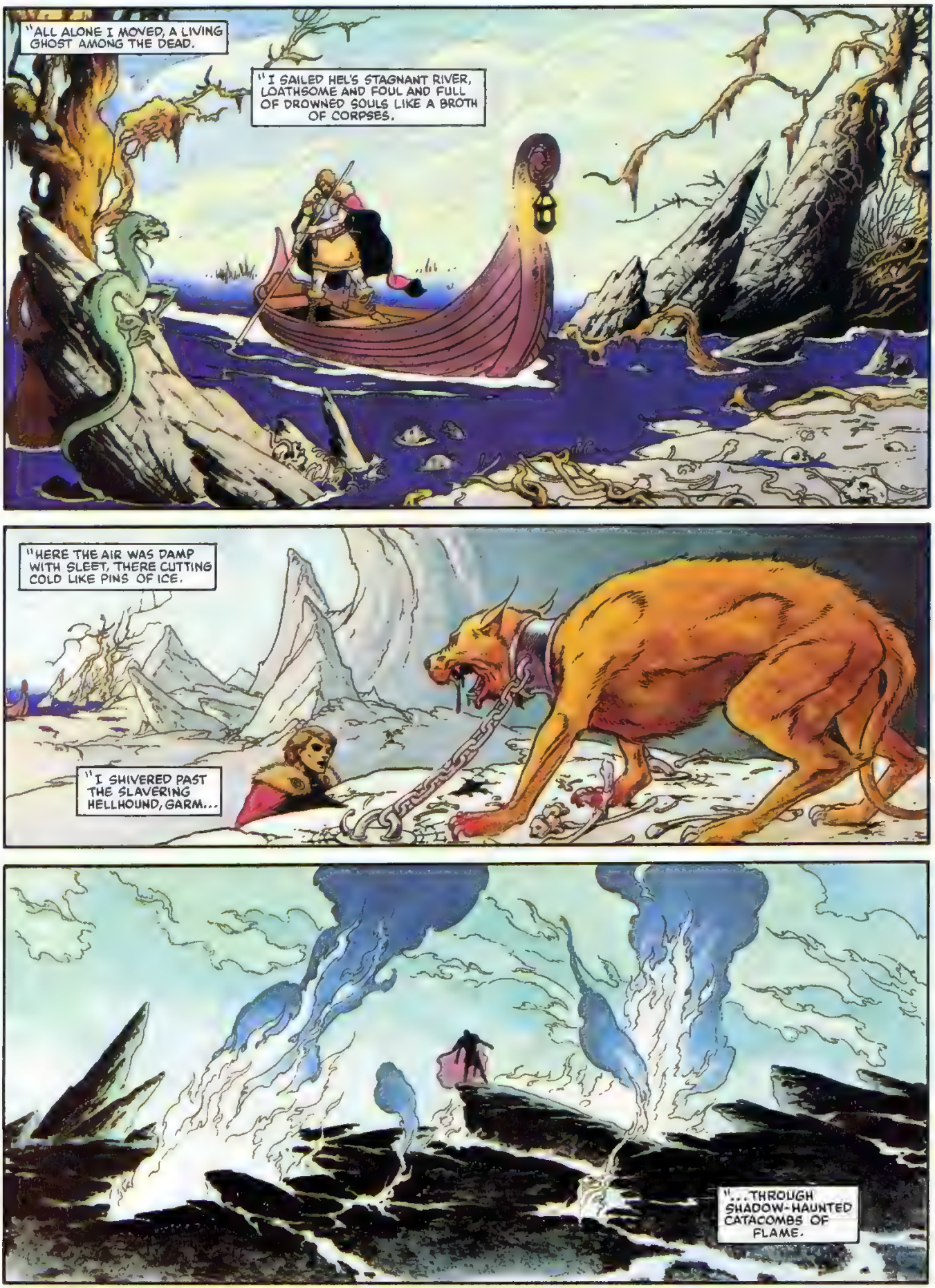
OH I AM LOST AND NONE CAN HELP ME AND SOON THE MONSTER--
FOOTSTEPS! OH DEAR, DEARY! HE'S BACK TO EAT ME! I'VE NEVER BEEN EATEN BEFORE, WHATEVER SHALL I--
HERE'S OUR WEEPING VOICE!
MERCY ON US! BUT--? YOU'RE NO OGRE!
OH, THEN, NOBLE SIRS WHO ARE NO OGRE, BE SO KIND TO CUT ME LOOSE, AND QUICK ABOUT IT IF YOU PLEASE IF I MAY...
...FOR I'VE WONDERED AND WISHED ALL THE DAY LONG THAT SOMEONE MIGHT HAPPEN BY--
--AS YOU HAPPEN TO HAVE HAPPENED TO SAVE ME FROM THE STEWPOT.
FEAR NOT-- THERE! YOU'RE FREE.
PINECONES! THAT MAKES ME GIDDY WITH GLEE!
BUT THEN YOU'VE NO IDEA WHO ME IS, THAT IS WHO I AM I MEAN, DO YOU?
I AM ODDBRAND OTTER.
AND IF I'D NOT BUMPED MY HEAD SLIDING DOWN A MUDBANK INTO THE GOPUL RIVER, AS WE OTTER GODS LIKE TO DO FOR PLEASURE-- SLIDE DOWN MUD-BANKS NOT BUMP OUR HEADS...
...THEN I'D NEVER HAVE BEEN CARRIED AWAY TO END UP LOST IN THE ENCHANTED CHASM WHERE THAT HORRIBLE OGRE FOUND ME AND BOUND ME.
HE SWORE HE'D EAT MY EYE-BALLS WITH MUCK RADISH--
--AFTER HE'D FIRST SKINNED ME ALIVE TO MAKE A FUR PILLOW FOR HIS HEAD!
I AM BALDER ODINSON AND MY COM-PANION, GREYVAL GRIMSON.
JOIN US ON OUR WAY TO VALHALLA, FRIEND, FOR THERE IS SAFETY IN COMPANY.
VAL...; VALHALLA? LAND OF THE D...D...DEAD? MERCY! THAT'S BORROWING TROUBLE I DARESAY.
LESS TROUBLE THAN GREASING AN OGRE'S GULLET, FELLOW.
HERE'S THY SWORD. LET'S OFF.
OH DEAR, DEARY. ARE YOU SURE THIS IS A PRACTICAL THING TO DO?

HERE BRIEF IS BEST--THOUGH MANY WERE THE DANGERS ALL ALONG THE WAY, BY AND BY THEY CAME, HALE AND HEARTY, TO VALHALLA'S GOLDEN BRIDGE, HIDDEN BEHIND A VEIL OF CLOUD...
MERCY ON US, PRINCE BALDER! THAT'S A CURIOUS CLAMOR I HEAR BUT CAN'T SEE?
IT'S NOT THE SOUND OF SPLASHING AFTER FROGS OR SLEDDING IN THE SNOW, FOR BY MY BOOTS THOSE ARE NOISES I'D QUITE REMEMBER.
'TIS THE CLASH OF LANCE ON LANCE, ODDBRAND, AND BLADE AGAINST BLADE, THE ROAR OF BATTLE.
B...B...BATTLE!? OH, PLEASE, MASTER GREYVAL, I'M AN OTTER OF MINIMUM COURAGE.
WAR FRIGHTENS ME MORE THAN A SNOWBALL IN THE EYE.
HA! NAY, FRIEND. 'TIS BUT MOCK BATTLE, THE SPORT OF THE NOBLE DEAD WHOSE WOUNDS HEAL BY NIGHTFALL WHEN ALLFATHER SETS FEASTS FOR THEM.
YOU MUST LET ME GO NOW, LITTLE FELLOW.
BUT YOU WEAR NO ENCHANTMENT SUCH AS KING ODIN WOVE FOR US TO VISIT THE HALL OF THE SLAIN WHILE WE'RE YET ALIVE. WAIT 'TIL OUR RETURN.
OH, HURRY BACK DO IF YOU PLEASE IF I MAY.
BALDER, I FEAR I'LL NEVER FIND MY FATHER 'MIDST THIS SWARMING HOST OF VALIANT SPIRITS.

LOOK FOR GRIM MAGNUS IN THE VANGUARD. THAT WAS EVER HIS PLACE IN THE VIGOR OF LIFE.
NAY. HERE AM I, ALONE ON THIS CRAG, ALOOF FROM THE ROISTEROUS BATTLE-PLAY.
FOR I HAVE NO WILL TO REJOICE AND JOIN IN ARMS...
...KNOWING THAT I LEFT BEHIND ME IN THE LAND OF THE LIVING A SON OF FAINT HEART.
GREYVAL, I KNOW ALL THAT PASSED AFTER MY SOUL FLED LIFE.
MY SPIRIT SAW YOU DANCE AMONG THE TROLLS.
HOW COULD YOU BETRAY US SO?

WHAT POET WILL EVER RAISE HIS HARP TO SING MY SON'S DEEDS HERE IN ODIN'S SHIELD-ROOFED HALL?
FATHER...
...GIVE ME YOUR COUNSEL AND FORGIVENESS, AND I WILL WIN FAME'S UNDYING GLORY.
AT LAST MY HEART SOARS!
AYE, YET YOU MAY REDEEM YOURSELF, MY SON, MAYHAP BECOME THE GREATEST OF US ALL.
KNOW THIS --THE *NORNS* IN THEIR FOREST CAN UNRIDDLE WHERE THE RAVEN BANNER'S HID.
BUT FIRST YOU MUST SOJOURN IN *HEL*, THE DARKEST REALM OF ALL, BITTER COLD AND FULL OF HORROR.
THERE YOU'LL SEE THE WRETCHED FATE OF HOLLOW LIVES MISSPENT IN COWARDICE AND MEAN SPIRIT.
SUCH WILL BE *YOUR* SORROWFUL LOT IF YOU FAIL TO MAKE VALOR YOUR HARD-EDGED SWORD AND VIRTUE YOUR SHIELD.

BALDER MAY NOT ATTEND YOU THERE.
YOU MUST GO ALONE, GREYVAL.
AT...AT ONCE, FATHER.
NOW, FAREWELL, MY SON AND HEIR.
ODIN SPEED THE DAY YOU SIT TO MY RIGHT HAND IN ETERNITY'S LOFTY MEAD-HALL.
I'LL 'WAIT THEE, DEAR FRIEND, AT THE GOLDEN BRIDGE.
MAY THY JOURNEY BE AS SWIFT...
"...AS THY HEART IS WILLING..."
ALONE.


"ALL ALONE I MOVED, A LIVING GHOST AMONG THE DEAD.
"I SAILED HEL'S STAGNANT RIVER, LOATHSOME AND FOUL AND FULL OF DROWNED SOULS LIKE A BROTH OF CORPSES.
"HERE THE AIR WAS DAMP WITH SLEET, THERE CUTTING COLD LIKE PINS OF ICE.
"I SHIVERED PAST THE SLAVERING HELLHOUND, GARM...
"...THROUGH SHADOW-HAUNTED CATACOMBS OF FLAME.

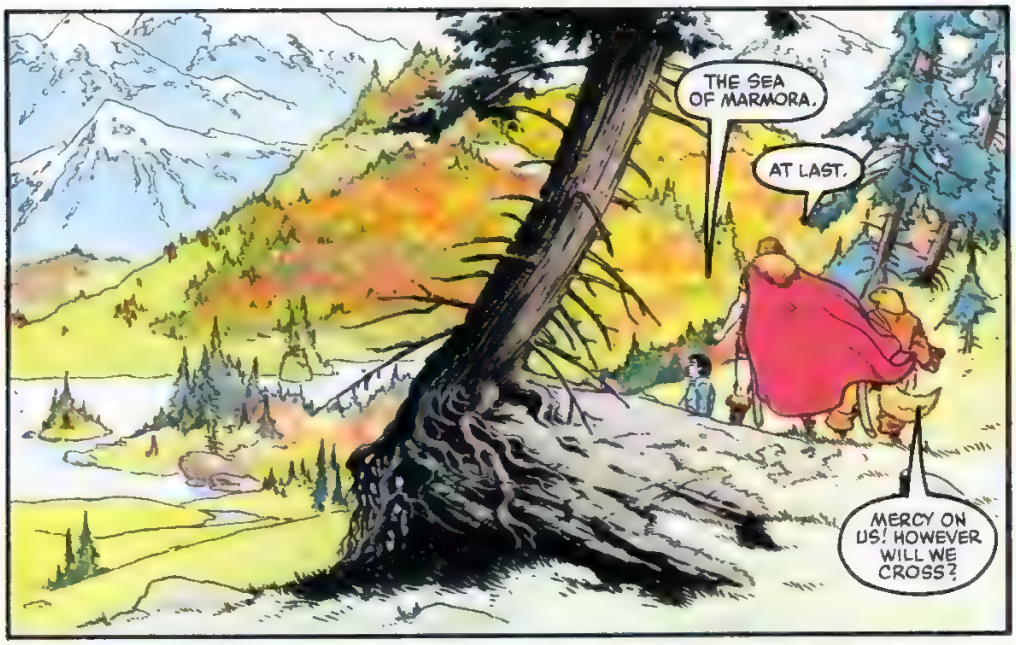
"ALONE I WALKED AMONG THE CRINGING DAMNED AND THE UNDREAMING DEAD WHO KNOW NO END OF TORMENTS, NO END OF DARKNESS...
"...THEIR EYES BLIND WITH BLOOD, THEIR NOSTRILS THICK WITH THE STENCH OF THE DEVOURING DRAGON.
"OH, THERE ARE HORRORS WITHOUT NAME IN THE DANK PITS OF HEL!

"BUT NONE MORE HARROWING THAN SHE WHO SITS THE INFERNAL THRONE--
"--DEATH'S GODDESS HELA, HALF BLACKNESS HALF FLESH.
"HER GAZE IS LIKE A GLACIER ON THE FROZEN SEA, ALL TRUTH AND TERRIBLE BEAUTY.
"SHE REVEALED TO ME THE ROTTING HEL-THING I WOULD BE IF MY COURAGE FAILED ME, AND I CRIED OUT--
"NEVER!"

NEVER!
I'VE SEEN ALL I WISH.
I SWEAR IT, BALDER, THE QUEEN OF HEL SHALL NEVER OWN MY SOUL.
I MUST STRAIGHTAWAY FIND THE NORNS AS MY FATHER BID.
FATE'S WEIRD SISTERS DWELL AT THE ROOTS OF THE WORLD TREE IN A FOREST BEYOND THE SEA OF MARMORA.
LET'S HASTEN...
"...BUT NOT FORGET OUR COMPANION AT THE FAR END OF THE GOLDEN BRIDGE..."
DEAR, DEARY!
SPEAR-MAIDS WITH EYES OF FIRE CARRYING D...D...DEAD WARRIORS--!
OH, DO ME NO HARM, VALKYRIE.
I'M BUT A POOR OTTER WITH THE LEAST LITTLE LEAST BIT OF PLUCK...
THOSE WERE SYGNET AND HER SWORD-SISTERS WHO PASSED OVER US NOW.
WHY DID SHE NOT HAIL ME?
SYGNET WOULD NOT STAY THEE ONE MOMENT'S PASSING FROM THY COURSE.
GREYVAL, THE SHIELD-MAIDS BEAR HEROES NEWLY-SLAIN.
IT CAN ONLY MEAN THE GIANTS, EMBOLDENED BY THE RAVEN BANNER, HARRY ASGARD ANEW BEFORE A FINAL GRAND ASSAULT.
BLESS MY BOOTS, HERE YOU ARE, NOBLE SIRS!
AND I WAS JUST SAYING TO MYSELF, YOU KNOW, THINKING AND WONDERING OUT LOUD WHETHER AND WHEN WE MIGHT BE...
...LEAVING THESE PARTS?
AT ONCE, FOR TIME WAITS ON NO GOD.

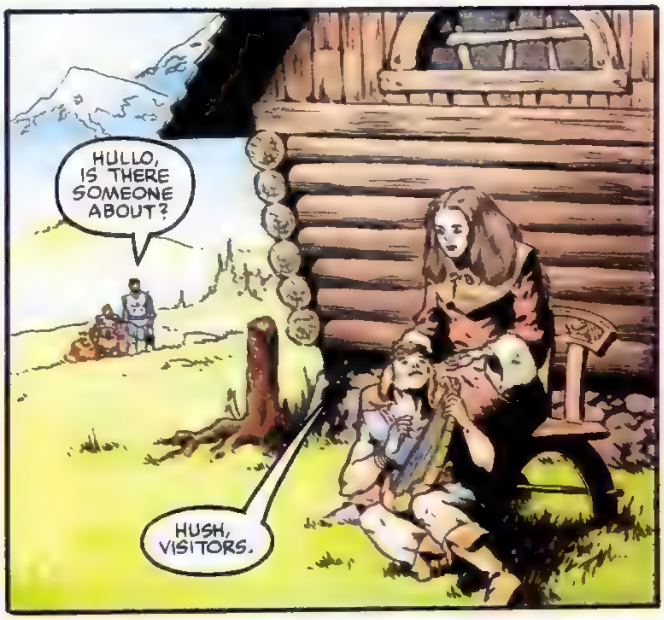
SO THEY THREE SET OFF FOR THE SEA OF MARMORA...
...AND SINCE THEIR JOURNEY WAS SWIFT AND SURE...
...LISTEN WHAT HAPPENED IN THE MEANWHILE TO HORSKULD IN THE GREENWOOD OUTSIDE THE GOLDEN REALM...
BAH! I'VE RIDDEN ABOUT AND ROUNDABOUT, NOT ONE CLUE.
CURSE ME FOR A MAID AT HER SPINDLE IF I CAN'T FIND IT ON MY OWN!
YET I'D SOONER FAIL THAN CONDESCEND TO SEEK ANOTHER GOD'S COUNSEL.
NAY. I'LL SUCCEED.
AND THEN PROUD SYGNET WILL RUE HER CHOICE OF MY FOOL COUSIN ABOVE MYSELF.
HARK, MAN-GOD OF ASGARD! I'LL WHISPER A SECRET, AND--HUSH!--NONE NEED KNOW. ONLY PROVE YOURSELF WORTHY.
WHO IS THAT?
WHO SPEAKS?
ALL ANSWERS IN DARK DUE TIME. FIRST--BEYOND THE GROVE A MOTHER DEER NESTLES HER FAWN. SLAY DOE AND DARLING BOTH--AND THE BANNER'S YOURS.
THE BANNER!

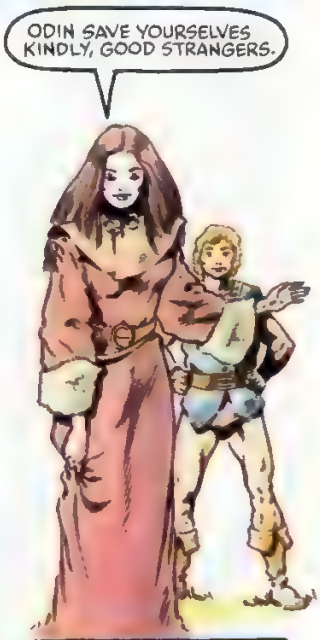
WELL? SPEAK! I'VE DONE THE DEED!
WHOEVER YOU ARE, SHOW YOURSELF-- WHERE'S OUR BARGAIN?
THE BEAST'S BLOOD-- IT... IT BOILS?
HEEAII!
A TROLL!
I AM SLY OTNY.
HYEK! I'LL KEEP TO MY WHISPERED WORD, BRAVE HORSKULD.
FOR NONE IN ASGARD'S MORE NOBLE, THAT'S CLEAR.
YOU'VE EARNED THE BANNER, WORTHY ONE...

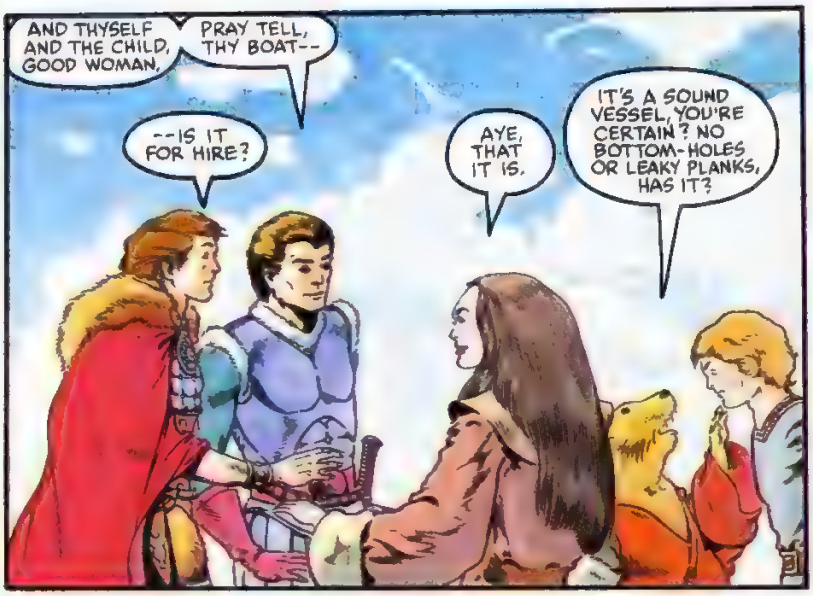

THE SEA OF MARMORA.
AT LAST.
MERCY ON US! HOWEVER WILL WE CROSS?

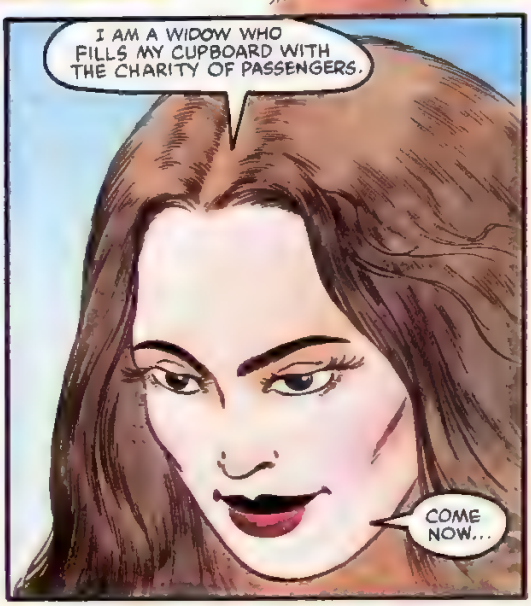
I'LL HEW A RAFT OF MOUNTAIN PINES--
NAY, LOOK!

GOOD FORTUNE, A FERRYMAN'S COTTAGE.


HULLO, IS THERE SOMEONE ABOUT?
HUSH, VISITORS.


ODIN SAVE YOURSELVES KINDLY, GOOD STRANGERS.


AND THYSELF AND THE CHILD, GOOD WOMAN.
PRAY TELL, THY BOAT--
--IS IT FOR HIRE?
AYE, THAT IT IS.
IT'S A SOUND VESSEL, YOU'RE CERTAIN? NO BOTTOM-HOLES OR LEAKY PLANKS, HAS IT?


I AM A WIDOW WHO FILLS MY CUPBOARD WITH THE CHARITY OF PASSENGERS.
COME NOW...

"...MY SON AND I SAIL TO THE FAR SHORE..."
THE WIND BLOWS EVEN. HERE'S OPPORTUNITY TO SLEEP.
EVEN THE MOST STEADFAST HERO MUST RENEW HIS STRENGTH.
QUITE RIGHT, QUITE RIGHT, BALDER. AND IF SLEEP MAKES HEROES...
...MAYHAP --YAAWN-- I'LL WAKE A NOBLE KNIGHT.
MAYHAP YOU WILL, MY FURRY FRIEND.
GO, BALDER, ODDBRAND, REST BELOW.
I WOULD LISTEN STILL TO THE SWEEPING SEA AND THINK ON ALL THAT'S BEEN...
...AND YET MAY BE.
GREYVAL. GREYVAL GRIMSON.
WHO--? OH, 'TIS YOU, FERRYWOMAN.
DESTINY IS AS THE SEA.
SOME FIND TREASURE ON THE WAVES, WHILE OTHERS DROWN AND SHARE THE WHALE'S GRAVE.
AYE, GOOD WOMAN, YOU KNOW MY INMOST THOUGHTS.
KNOW MINE IN TURN, I'LL NOT LIE--
--THE BEAUTY OF YOUR GODLY FORM STIRS PASSION'S FLAME WITHIN MY BREAST.
OH, SAIL WITH ME BEYOND DESTINY TO THE CAREFREE LAND OF TROLLS WHERE WE COULD LIVE AS LOVERS FOR ETERNITY.

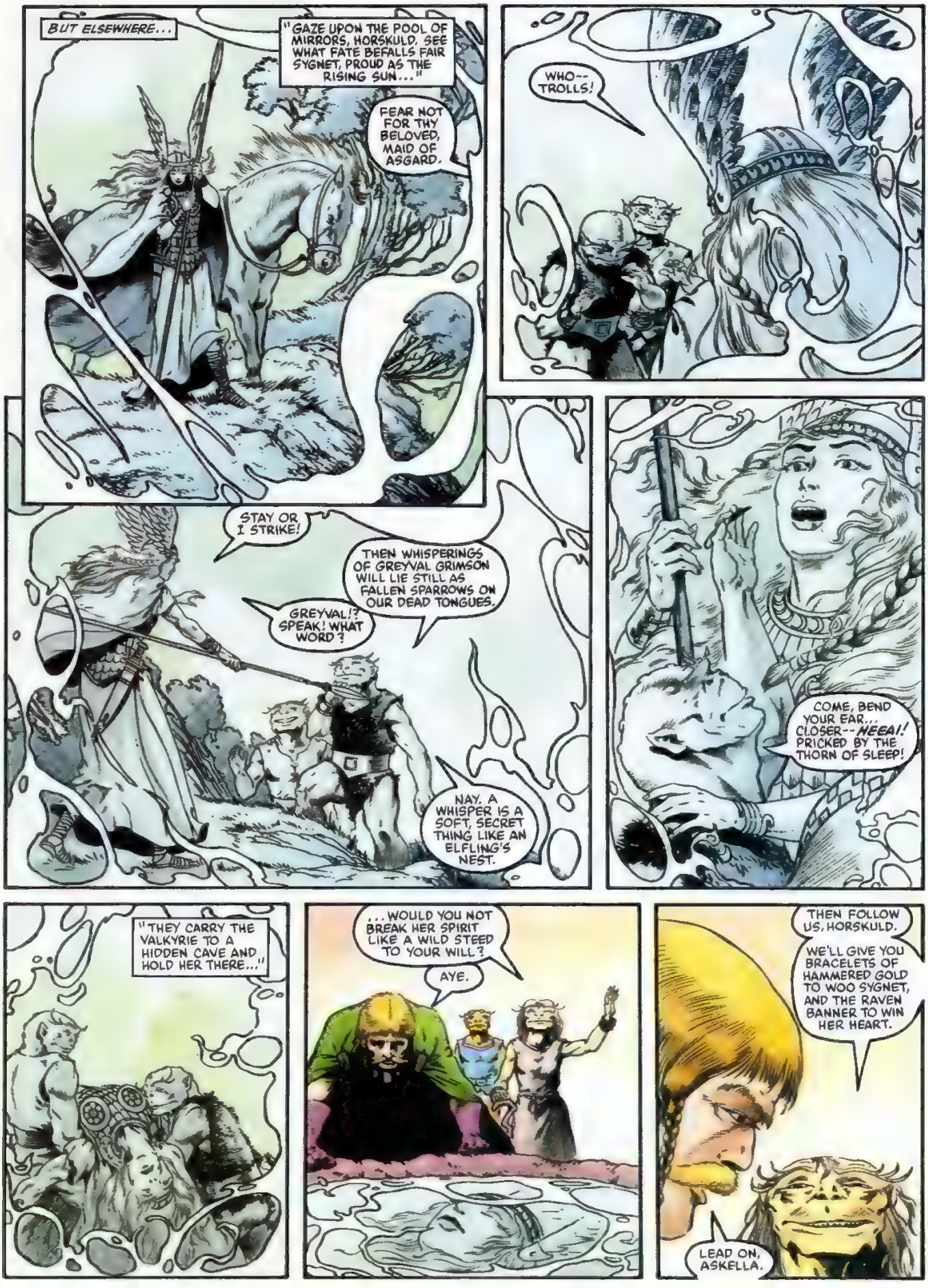
WOMAN, WHAT ARE THESE MAD WORDS?
NOT MADNESS, GODLING...
...BUT THE MEANS TO BREAK THY WILL!
ASKELLA!
THEN YOU'RE NO WIDOW, TROLLWITCH!
NOR I A CHILD-- HYEK! GIVE IT UP, GREYVAL!
SVIN!
FOOLISH GOD, GIVE IT UP!
STAY BACK. I WISH YOU NO HARM--
GIVE IT--
NEVER!
UPPNGH-- NYA!! A MORTAL THRUST!
YOU'VE SLAIN SVIN!

HAOOOW
CONFOUND YOU, ASGARDIAN! YOUR LIFE'S NOW FORFEIT TO MY WITCHCRAFT!
WIND GIANT, WIND GIANT, HOWL FORTH FREE, BY THE RUNE OF RAW WINTER ASKELLA SUMMONS THEE!
WRACK THIS CRAFT AND RACK THIS GODLING'S SOUL-- TO DARKEST HEL WITH HIM!
HAAOOOOOOOWL

HAAOOOOOL
HEEAI!
GREYVAL! THE SEA POUNDS, THE WIND BURSTS!
'TIS A TEMPEST!
I'VE BROUGHT THIS TROLL'S CURSE ON US, GOOD BALDER.
KEEP BELOW--SAVE YOURSELF AND ODDBRAND!
WHAT!?
AND LEAVE THEE TO THE DRIVING STORM?
NAY, FRIEND.
ODIN PRESERVE US!
THE MAST SPLITS ASUNDER!
AND THE SEA LASHES LIKE STRAPS OF RAW LEATHER!
HAHAHAHAHA
HOLD FAST TO THIS DRIFTING TIMBER OR THE WAVES WILL CRUSH US!

OH, BOTHER AND NONSENSE, WHAT A NIGHTMARE, WHAT A FRIGHT!
I DREAMED OUR BOAT WAS LOST IN A MAELSTROM AND MASTER GREYVAL SWEPT TO THE FOAM ALONG WITH PRINCE BAL--
MERCY! IT'S TRUE!
OH, HELP!
OH, HELP AND HURRYNGHLUGH
gluug glug
DEAR ME-- GLUUG-- DEAR YOU! ALL'S LOST, ALL'S --KOFF--LOST!
HYEK! YOUR HOLLOW CORPSES WILL CRAWL WITH SEAWORMS...
... WHILE I'LL HIE ME TO WIN OTHER SOULS FOR THE KINGDOM OF TROLLS.

DEAR, DEARY, DEARIER, AND DEARIEST!
I'M WATERFULLY WOEBEGONE... WE'LL ALL BE DROWNED...UNLESS ...OH, I WISH I WISH--
A BOTTLE IN MY BAG!
DO HURRY DO HURRY UNSTOP THE CORK UNCORK THE STOP AND--
THERE! IT WORKS! IT WORKS!
PINECONES! THAT PUTS AN END TO THE WINDY DEVIL OR DOESN'T IT?
AND HERE'S OUR DESTINATION, THE FAR SHORE OF MARMORA.
WHEREVER DIDST THOU GET THAT WONDERFUL FLASK, FRIEND?
IN MY FATHER'S BAG OF WONDERS, PRINCE BALDER.
IT'S A SPECIAL SORT OF MAGICAL BAG THAT FILLS UP WITH WHAT IT OUGHT TO BE FULL OF ALMOST ALWAYS WHENEVER YOU PUT YOUR MIND TO WISHING FOR IT.
ONLY I WAS SO FEARFUL OF THE WAVES I NEARLY FORGOT TO WISH INTO IT.
WELL, ODDBRAND, YOU'RE A WISHFUL SORT OF HERO AFTER ALL.
A WISHFUL SORT OF HERO! DO YOU THINK SO REALLY, MASTER GREYVAL?


BUT ELSEWHERE...
"GAZE UPON THE POOL OF MIRRORS, HORSKULD. SEE WHAT FATE BEFALLS FAIR SYGNET, PROUD AS THE RISING SUN..."
FEAR NOT FOR THY BELOVED, MAID OF ASGARD.
WHO-- TROLLS!
STAY OR I STRIKE!
THEN WHISPERINGS OF GREYVAL GRIMSON WILL LIE STILL AS FALLEN SPARROWS ON OUR DEAD TONGUES.
GREYVAL!? SPEAK! WHAT WORD?
NAY. A WHISPER IS A SOFT, SECRET THING LIKE AN ELFLING'S NEST.
COME, BEND YOUR EAR... CLOSER--NEEA!! PRICKED BY THE THORN OF SLEEP!
"THEY CARRY THE VALKYRIE TO A HIDDEN CAVE AND HOLD HER THERE..."
...WOULD YOU NOT BREAK HER SPIRIT LIKE A WILD STEED TO YOUR WILL?
AYE.
THEN FOLLOW US, HORSKULD.
WE'LL GIVE YOU BRACELETS OF HAMMERED GOLD TO WOO SYGNET, AND THE RAVEN BANNER TO WIN HER HEART.
LEAD ON, ASKELLA.

IF YOU PLEASE IF I MAY, PRINCE BALDER, IS THERE NO END TO THE NORN FOREST?
FOR I WAS JUST DREAMING, YOU KNOW, HOW NICE WOULD BE A BELLYFUL'S BOWLFUL OF MOIST SEA URCHINS JUST ABOUT NOW.
WE NEAR JOURNEY'S END. THIS LAST WAY LEADS TO THE NORNS OF DESTINY.
HUGINN, MUNINN? THE ALL-FATHER'S RAVENS!
BATTLE IS ABOUT TO BREAK? I DID SUSPECT THE GIANTS OF SO SWIFT A MOVE.
THE ALL-FATHER RECALLS ME TO COUNCIL OF WAR.
THOSE ARE HIS VERY WORDS?
MUST YOU LEAVE ME?
WAR!?
'TIS ODIN'S WILL. BUT THOU ART PROVEN MOST VALIANT IN SOUL, GREYVAL.
AND THOU HAST A WISHFUL SORT OF HERO FOR THY PAGE.
QUITE RIGHT, QUITE RIGHT. YOU'LL FIND NO MORE ABLE ATTENDANT, MASTER GREYVAL, NOR MORE FAITHFUL.
THAT IS IF YOU'LL HAVE ME... UH ...THAT IS??
AYE, ODDBRAND OTTER. YOU SHALL BE MY SQUIRE-AT-ARMS.
AT ARMS? DEAR ME, OH YES, QUITE RIGHT.
AS FOR YOU, BRAVE BALDER... KIND BALDER, FAREWELL.

COME, ODDBRAND. BALDER COUNSELED THAT THIS ROOT WILL LEAD US...
...TO THE WORLD TREE, YGGDRASILL, THE MIGHTY ASH.
NOW WE MUST TRAVEL DOWNWARDS AND YET FARTHER DOWNWARDS, PAST THESE GNARLED AND KNOTTED ROOTS...
...DEEP DOWN TO THE SACRED WELL OF WYRD, THE SPRING OF DESTINY...

...HERE TO LEARN THE FATE THE NORNS PREPARE FOR ME.
WEAVE AND SPIN. LIFE'S THREADS BEGIN. WHERE WILL THEY END? WEAVE, TWINE, AND SPIN.
ALL HAIL, GREYVAL, SON OF GRIM MAGNUS.
A RIDDLE, A RUNE--
THREE PATHS LEAD FROM THESE CAVERNS.
THE FIRST, MOST SWIFT, WENDS SAFELY TO YOUR HOMESTEAD, WHERE YOU'LL ENJOY ETERNAL LIFE--IN EVERLASTING SHAME.
THE SECOND--TO THE RAVEN BANNER, NEAR YET FAR.
FOR YOUR COURAGE NEWLY FORGED IS NOT YET TRIED.
RASH AND RUEFUL IS THIS ROAD.
THE THIRD PATH LEADS TO YOUR BELOVED BRIDE.
KNOW, SHE IS PRISONER SOUTHWARDS IN THE LAND OF ROCK TROLLS.
SYGNET HELD! WHAT CHOICE IS THAT? I GO TO RESCUE HER--
AND SO YOU CHOOSE THE LONGEST WAY, BUT SHORTEST IN THE END.

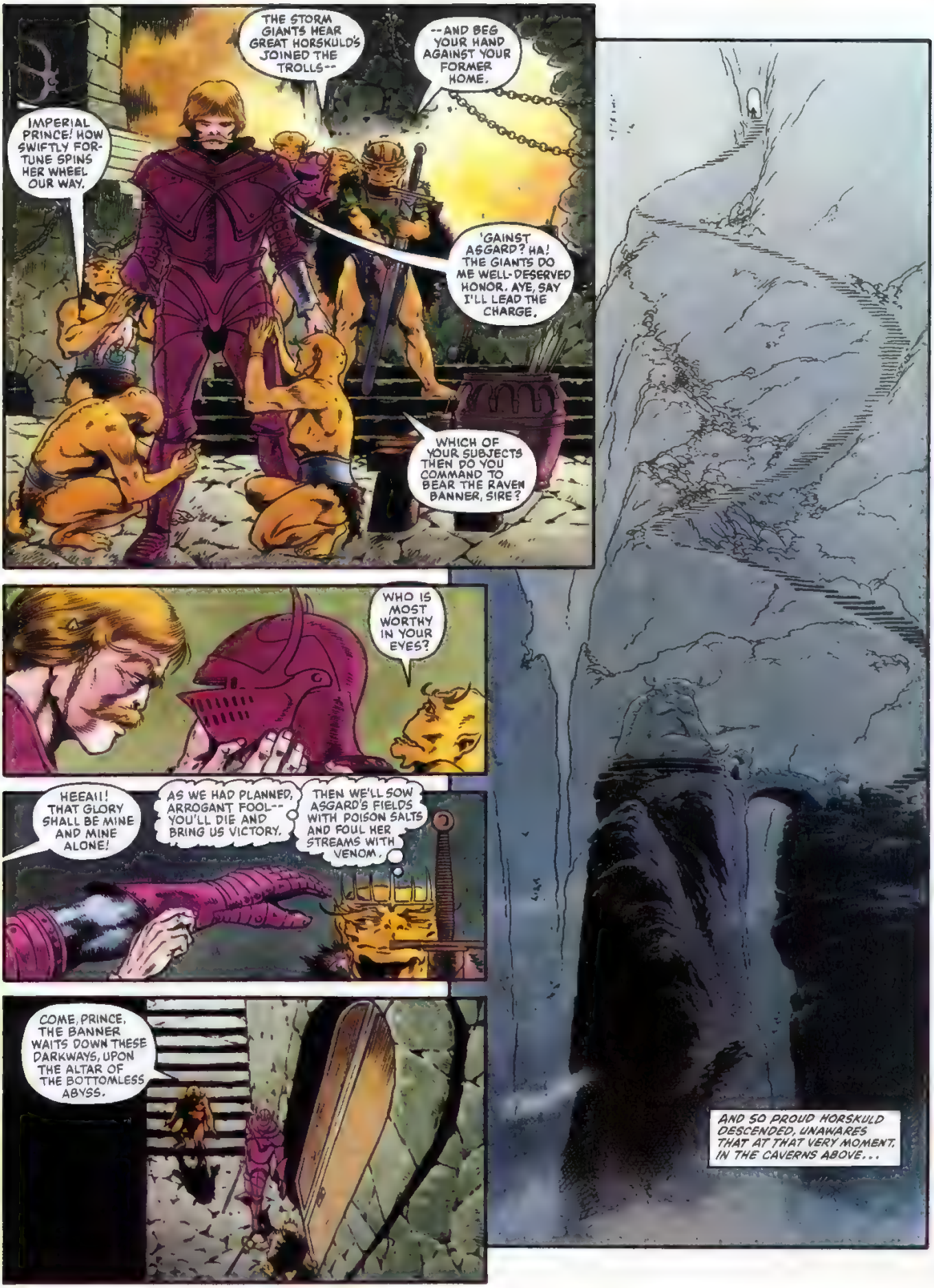
YOU CHOOSE A HERO'S DESTINY.
I'M OFF--!
BUT TARRY ONE WORD MORE.
ALLFATHER ODIN GRANTS THEE GULLINBURSTI, HIS MAGIC BOAR...
...WHOSE GOLDEN BRISTLES LIGHT THE DARKEST GLOOM...
...WHO'S FLEET ON LAND AND FAST AT SEA AND FLIES THE AIR.
THE GOLDEN BOAR WAITS DOWN THE PATH YOU'VE CHOSEN.
HASTEN, FOR THIS VERY HOUR I HEAR THE GIANTS GRINDING IRON BLADES AT THEIR SPARKING WHETSTONE!
AND HORSKULD--
HUSH, SISTER! HE WILL LEARN OF HORSKULD WHEN TIME WILLS.
COME, ODDBRAND. WE STRIDE TO MIGHTY DEEDS.
MASTER GREYVAL, IF YOU PLEASE, I MEAN, I...
...WELL, ROCK TROLLS AND ALL, I... MUST CONFESS--
THAT YOU ARE FRIGHTENED?
HERE'S GULLINBURSTI! TRUST ME, ODDBRAND, ONLY A FOOL LACKS FEAR. A HERO CONQUERS IT.
THEN CONQUER IT I WILL... PERHAPS... AS SOON AS WE'RE-- ;GULP!;--ON SOLID GROUND AGAIN...

NOW ALL THIS WHILE IN THE KINGDOM OF THE TROLLS...
COME, HORSKULD! HERE'S MORE MEAD, OUR HONORED GUEST.
A CHALLENGE! WHO CAN DRAIN THE HORN-O'-PLENTY IN ONE DRAFT?
HA! GIVE ME THAT-- GLAARGH!
THOR, THE LORD OF THUNDER'S NOT HALF THE TRENCHERMAN AS WE HAVE HERE.
'TIS YOU SHOULD BE THE PRINCE OF GODS, HORSKULD.
A FEAT! A FEAT!
MOST NOBLE, OH MOST GLORIOUS, MOST WORTHY.
A PLEDGE! A PLEDGE UPON THE DRINKING HORN! RENOUNCE THE DAYLIGHT AND BE PRINCE OF TROLLS!
PRINCE HORSKULD ...SOUNDS NOT BAD.
PRINCE HORSKULD, KEEPER OF THE RAVEN BANNER!
PEERLESS PRINCE AND WARRIOR KNIGHT!
AND MAYHAP KING OF ASGARD SOON, AS YOU DESERVE, QUEEN SYGNET BY YOUR SIDE.
AYE, LUCK OF THE RUNES, I'LL STAY!
HEEAI! THE BELLS! THE HARPS!
SOUND THE SILVER HORNS OF ELFLAND FOR OUR GRACIOUS LORD AND LIEGE!
BUT ELSEWHERE AND SOON AFTER...
OH, MASTER GREYVAL, IF OTTERS WERE MEANT TO FLY SHOULDN'T YOU THINK WE'D ALL BE BORN WITH WINGS LIKE WOODPECKERS, OR CUCKOO BIRDS? NO, I--
HUSH, ODDBRAND, THE ROCK TROLLS DWELL AN ARROW-SHOT BELOW.
BUT, MASTER, LOOK! A ST... ST... STORM GIANT STANDS GUARD, SWORD A'SWAY--!?

I COME FOR MY VALKYRIE BRIDE!
YOU COME TO DIE, WHEY-FACED GODLING--
--BY THE SAME COLD STEEL THAT SPILLED GRIM MAGNUS' BLOOD LIKE THE JUICE OF OVERRIPE BERRIES.
FOR SNORTH HOLDS THESE CRAGS 'TIL ASGARD FALLS TO HIS BROTHERS!
HANG YOU, VILLAIN! I'LL HAVE SYGNET--
CLA AAANNG
--AND WREAK MY FATHER'S VENGEANCE IN THE BARGAIN!
THE HILLS! MASTER GREYVAL, THE HILLS ARE MOVING!
ROCK TROLLS!
HA HA HA HA
THEY'LL KILL US--
FEAR NOT, SQUIRE, FOR I AM A GOD AND THE SON OF MIGHTY HEROES!

NYEEK! FLEE!
FLEE!
GREYVAL!
THAT'S SYGNET'S VOICE?
IN THERE!
BELOVED!
OH, HUSBAND, HOLD ME FAST.
ALAS, I WAS A HASTY FOOL TO SEND YOU OFF.
GIVE UP THIS ILL-STARRED QUEST.
TAKE ME BACK TO OUR HOMESTEAD, AND LET US LIVE AS LOVERS--
BUT THE BANNER--?
HULLO?
HERE'S A TORCH IF YOU PLEASE, FOR A TRUE SQUIRE EVER LIGHTS HIS MASTER'S WAY--
THAT... THAT MISSHAPEN SHADOW?

BY THE SHADOW'S TRUTH!
A QUEER AND BASE ILLUSION--ASKELLA!
LET ME BE, LET ME BE... THIS KEY... HUNPH...THE DOOR...
GREYVAL!
FAIREST BRIDE!
LET ME ...UNPH ...BE... MERCY! MERCY!
AYE, AS YOU'VE SHOWN MERCY, SO'S MERCY YOURS, WITCH.
NYAII!
INTO MY BAG WITH THE KEY...
...AND WITH A WISH IT'S WHISKED TO MAGIC WORLDS NEVER TO OPEN THIS DOOR AGAIN.
HAD I RETRIEVED THE BANNER WHEN MY FATHER FELL, THE GIANTS WOULD NOT DARE STORM ASGARD SO SOON AGAIN.
COUNTLESS SUMMERS' DALLIANCE THEN WERE OURS. BUT NOW--
MY WARRIOR, OUR LOVE WEARS NOT THE PALE, WEARY RAGS OF TIME, BUT THE GOLDEN RAIMENT OF ETERNITY.
THOUGH I FOREGO THE CLOSE WARMTH OF YOUR BREATH, FOREVER, LOVE...
...OUR SOULS SHALL BE AS ONE.
OFF NOW! THE BANNER'S HID WITHIN THE ABYSS OF SHADOWS IN THE KINGDOM OF THE TROLLS.
SO BRAGGED THE WITCH.
YOU MUST RIDE ESCORT TO MY LADY SYGNET, ODDBRAND, AND BE EVER BRAVE.
AS BRAVE AS YOU'S MY WISHFUL THOUGHT.
FAREWELL!
HAIL AND FAREWELL, MY HEART AND SOUL.
FAREWELL, OH DEAR, FAREWELL...

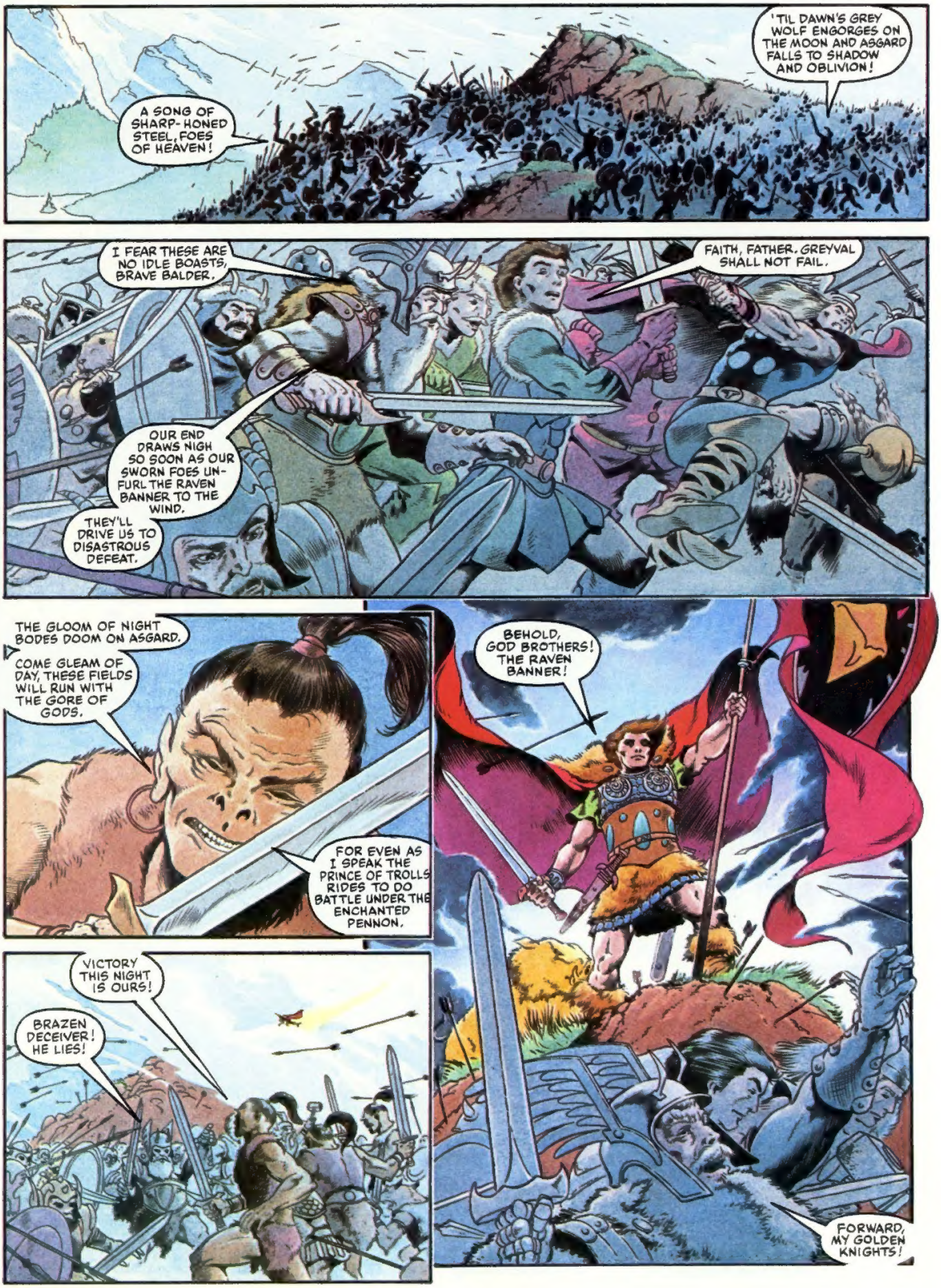

THE STORM GIANTS HEAR GREAT HORSKULD'S JOINED THE TROLLS--
--AND BEG YOUR HAND AGAINST YOUR FORMER HOME.
IMPERIAL PRINCE! HOW SWIFTLY FORTUNE SPINS HER WHEEL OUR WAY.
'GAINST ASGARD? HA! THE GIANTS DO ME WELL-DESERVED HONOR. AYE, SAY I'LL LEAD THE CHARGE.
WHICH OF YOUR SUBJECTS THEN DO YOU COMMAND TO BEAR THE RAVEN BANNER, SIRE?
WHO IS MOST WORTHY IN YOUR EYES?
HEEAII! THAT GLORY SHALL BE MINE AND MINE ALONE!
AS WE HAD PLANNED, ARROGANT FOOL-- YOU'LL DIE AND BRING US VICTORY.
THEN WE'LL SOW ASGARD'S FIELDS WITH POISON SALTS AND FOUL HER STREAMS WITH VENOM.
COME, PRINCE. THE BANNER WAITS DOWN THESE DARKWAYS, UPON THE ALTAR OF THE BOTTOMLESS ABYSS.
AND SO PROUD HORSKULD DESCENDED, UNAWARES THAT AT THAT VERY MOMENT, IN THE CAVERNS ABOVE...

WE ARE ARRIVED!
SHED YOUR RADIANCE, GULLINBURSTI!
DISPEL THIS CAVE'S ILLUSIONS!
NYAII! LIGHT BURSTS LIKE THE CURSED SUN DANCING ON THE GOLDEN TOWERS OF THE GODS!
NOW I SEE THE TRUTH--THESE ARE NO PLEASURE HALLS BUT THORN-RIDDEN WASTES.
FOR YOUR LIFE, TROLL! THE ABYSS OF SHADOWS--?
--URGH-- BELOW THESE CAVERNS... BUT OUR PRINCE... GUARDS THE RAVEN BANNER--
NAY, BY ALL THAT'S HOLY, GREYVAL SHALL REDEEM IT!
THEN HORSKULD'S NOT YET BEEN HERE.
GOLDEN TUSK, I CHARGE YOU TO KEEP THE TROLLS AT BAY 'TIL I CALL UPON YOU...
"...FROM BELOW..."
HERE'S THE BANNER! HAIEE! A CURSE ON ASGARD!
HORSKULD, YOU'VE PROVEN WORTHY BE-YOND ALL PRAISE!

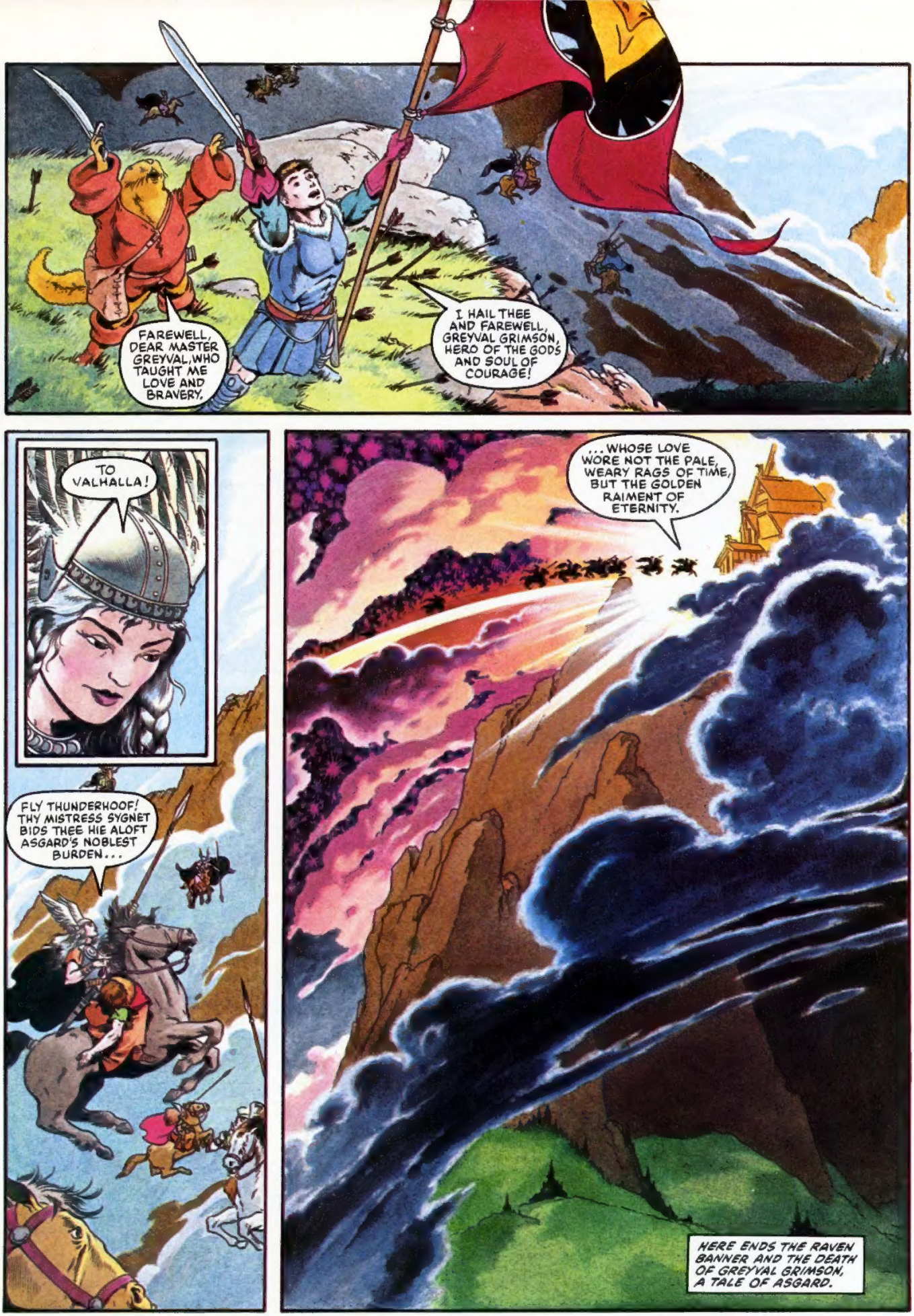
TURN ASIDE, TROLL PRINCE! TURN AND FLEE!
THE RAVEN BANNER'S MINE ORDAINED BY DESTINY.
NYAIIARGH
TAKE WARNING, RECKLESS WARRIOR! I'M BOUND BY SACRED OATH TO MY FATHER'S SPIRIT...
UNPH!
...AND TO MY BRIDE OF LIFE! I'LL NOT FAIL!

HELA TAKE YOU, GODLING!
AND BE DAMNED!
NEVER!
CLANG!
A PALTRY BLOW, COUSIN.
WHO--!?
HORSKULD!? YOU'RE PRINCE OF TROLLS!
YOU'VE...YOU'VE SOLD YOUR SOUL AND JOINED THEM--?
OH!
HEEAIII! NOW KNEEL AS VASSAL AT OUR FEET-- AND DIE!

THERE IS BLOOD ON THE MOON TONIGHT.
AYE, HORSKULD, ONE OF US MUST DIE.
BUT BY MY SHORTSWORD--
--'TIS NOT I!
THE LUCK OF THE RUNES BE WITH YOU, COUSIN!
NYAIiiiii
THE BOTTOMLESS ABYSS IS FILLED WITH BLOOD.
COME, GULLINBURSTI! URGENT DEEDS YET NEED DOING!
HIE THE RAVEN BANNER TO ASGARD!


A SONG OF SHARP-HONED STEEL, FOES OF HEAVEN!
'TIL DAWN'S GREY WOLF ENGORGES ON THE MOON AND ASGARD FALLS TO SHADOW AND OBLIVION!
I FEAR THESE ARE NO IDLE BOASTS, BRAVE BALDER.
FAITH, FATHER. GREYVAL SHALL NOT FAIL.
OUR END DRAWS NIGH SO SOON AS OUR SWORN FOES UNFURL THE RAVEN BANNER TO THE WIND.
THEY'LL DRIVE US TO DISASTROUS DEFEAT.
THE GLOOM OF NIGHT BODES DOOM ON ASGARD.
COME GLEAM OF DAY, THESE FIELDS WILL RUN WITH THE GORE OF GODS.
FOR EVEN AS I SPEAK THE PRINCE OF TROLLS RIDES TO DO BATTLE UNDER THE ENCHANTED PENNON.
BEHOLD, GOD BROTHERS! THE RAVEN BANNER!
VICTORY THIS NIGHT IS OURS!
BRAZEN DECEIVER! HE LIES!
FORWARD, MY GOLDEN KNIGHTS!

A ROUT! A ROUT! THE GIANTS FLEE!
WAR-FELLOWS, SOUND THE HORNS OF VICTORY!
PINECONES, PRINCE BALDER, THE BATTLE'S WON! DID I NOT PLY MY STEEL BOLDLY?
AYE, A TRIBUTE ...TO THY MASTER.
COME LET US PAY DUE HOMAGE TO OUR FALLEN FRIEND.
OH, LOOK! ALREADY THE VALKYRIE--
--DID YOU SAY FALLEN? MASTER GREYVAL?
OH DEAR, BUT THIS SIGHT MAKES ME SORROWFUL WITH SADNESS.
LADY SYGNET, THY BELOVED'S DEATH IS ASGARD'S SALVATION--
--AYE, AND OUR ETERNAL GLORY, BALDER. I ASK NO GREATER CONSOLATION.
NOW, GRACIOUS FRIEND, I ENTRUST THE BANNER TO THY KEEPING, 'TIL THE SON CONCEIVED UPON MY WEDDING NIGHT IS BORN TO CLAIM IT AS HIS BIRTHRIGHT.


FAREWELL, DEAR MASTER GREYVAL, WHO TAUGHT ME LOVE AND BRAVERY.
I HAIL THEE AND FAREWELL, GREYVAL GRIMSON, HERO OF THE GODS AND SOUL OF COURAGE!
TO VALHALLA!
FLY THUNDERHOOF! THY MISTRESS SYGNET BIDS THEE HIE ALOFT ASGARD'S NOBLEST BURDEN...
...WHOSE LOVE WORE NOT THE PALE, WEARY RAGS OF TIME, BUT THE GOLDEN RAIMENT OF ETERNITY.
HERE ENDS THE RAVEN BANNER AND THE DEATH OF GREYVAL GRIMSON, A TALE OF ASGARD.

FANTASY • MYTHOLOGY